

Gangubai Hangal's primary guru in music was Sawai Gandharva. She has also acknowledged the inspiration and influence of her mother Ambabai and Zohrabai Agrewali on her musical development. Her singing embodies an extraordinary grasp of the essence of raga, keen sensitivity of swara, and an acute feeling for aesthetic design. She lives in Hubli and

Excerpts of an interview from C.S. Lakshmi's *The Singer and the Song - Conversations with Women Musicians* Vol 1 (2000).

On her Padma Bhushan award:

Gangubai: It is normally announced to the D.C. (District Collector) here. Then they come to ask to check who the person is, whether they want to receive the award or not. "You have got it, do you want to accept it?" My uncle was sitting outside, I wasn't there. "What is it? If it is Padma Bhushan she will take it," he said. "If you come tomorrow she will be back." I came back. He said, "Look, you have got the Padma Bhushan." They came and took my signature from the Tehsildar's office. After they took it, I thought, 'These are announced on January 26th, maybe on the 25th night. I must listen to the radio before I sleep. Both of us must sit together before the radio, listen to the announcement and then sleep'. We sat for a long time. Nothing was announced. So I said, "Look, they asked me for my signature just like that. It's not there. Nothing has come." It did not occur to me that nobody's name was announced. Mine didn't come, this is all I thought. Then Mama went and slept, I came here and slept. It was 12.30 in the night when I got two congratulatory telegrams - Indira Gandhi's and Jagjivan Ram's. Who has ever sent congratulatory telegrams to me? (Laughter) I went and woke him up and he came and sat with me. What did we do? We cried till dawn. Because of music...all that we had gone through...The joy was real. But we thought of the past. That one person didn't live to see this, she didn't live to see this...

Q: Mother didn't see it...you thought that?

Gangubai: Yes. My grandmother didn't see, my householder(*) didn't see (*The word 'husband' does not exist in Kannada. A term commonly used is ejamanaru which means 'Master'). All this came to my mind. It was 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning. Then the paper came. There used to be a newspaperman who used to come here. Someone known to us went and got the paper- "Wake up, wake up, you have got the Padma Bhushan!" As soon as he said that, again everyone who was not here came to mind.

Q: Akka, you have been to many places-what were your experiences?

Gangubai: In the beginning I myself was a little afraid. Even if someone was with me, in one or two places I had doubts. I went to Calcutta in the beginning. When I went there, they saw me in my nine and a half yard sari...to look at I was very thin. What can she sing, they thought at that time. So what they did was...for me in Calcutta my programme was the next day. "Sing today with one of our accompanists," they said. They were doubtful if I could sing or not.

Q: They were scared?

Gangubai: Scared...In the beginning-you know Nargis, don't you? Nargis's mother was Jaddan Bai. She was a good singer. She got someone from Calcutta and introduced me as Gangubai. "She sings well in Bombay, book her in Calcutta," she said and sent them. So they came to me. On the whole no one had heard me sing. Over the radio, that is all. That's why they were doubtful. "How will she sing in the conference?" they thought. Just look at the situation. Sarangi people had come, tabla people were there. I said, "Why should I sing now? I will sing tomorrow." Nisar Husain Khan Saheb was sitting there. I believe he had heard these people talking when I wasn't there. He told me to sing. "They are doubtful if you have the voice or not. You can also get used to the accompaniment. Take a rehearsal," he said. Even he was doubtful. He told me this in Marathi. So after I sang for a while he thought, 'It's okay to have brought her all the way from Bombay.' Next day was my conference. Three or four medals were announced; I got one. When it was announced, I told you before, after it was over I felt bad. My mother didn't see the medal, didn't see me going to Bombay. I was so dejected (Gestures with hand on cheek.) Then Saigal came. He said, "Wah, Bai," and put his hand on my shoulder. I was used to that. My mother used to put her hand on my shoulder like that. Do you know what a strange feeling I had? I turned and saw Saigal. I got angry, very angry and told my uncle, "What kind of people are these? They keep their hands on another person's shoulder - can't they make out I am a woman?" (Laughs) Nowadays, they embrace. Now all this...(We laugh)

From Rediff.com, a tribute by **Gangubai** to **Mogubai Kurdikar** who passed away in Feb 2001.

I think only the words of the Kannada Bhakti poet, Basaveshwarayya, can best describe the dedication and *sadhana* of the *gaantapaswini*, Moghubai Kurdikar. Her passing away has left a deep void in the world of Hindustani music.

I have always enjoyed a special relationship with both Moghubai and her daughter (*classical singer Kishori Amonkar*). I first met Moghubai in 1962. We were drawn to each other since both of us were aware of the immense struggle we had to go through in the face of poverty to keep our music alive. Like me, she had a rural upbringing (*Moghubai was born in a small hamlet, Kurdi, in Goa on July 15, 1904*).

We often laughed about how names like ours -- which only seem to belong to maidservants these days -- have endured on in today's times. "*Tu majhya sarkhi, balbodh ni bholi* (*You are like me, childlike and innocent*)," she would say.

Moga means 'loved one' in Konkani. It was not uncommon in most homes for children to be addressed in this fashion. In Kannada, too, we say *maga* (*dear little child*) out of affection. The nickname stuck and went on to become Moghubai as she grew older. Of course, no one knew then that she would go on to become such a legend of the Jaipur gharana.

In 1962, she was already a big name while I had barely begun. If my memory does not fail me, it was Pandit D V Paluskar who introduced us and, I remember, I was tongue-tied. What can you say to someone who had earned the respect of everyone in the music world?

When everybody went for lunch, I hesitated. I did not know what to do. They all knew each other. Would it look odd for me to eat with them? I stood in a corner with the *pallu*

of my saree in my mouth. Then, I felt an affectionate hand on my shoulder. Moghubai's motherly voice said, "*Chal ga. Khaun ge don ghaas (Come and eat with me).*"

I was touched by her lack of pride. The fact that I came from another gharana (*Gangubai Hangal is the leading light of the Kirana gharana*) had not stopped her from being kind to me. Realising my discomfort about the city, she asked if I would like to stay with her. Since then, my address has often been her home on many of my visits to Bombay.

Whether it was cooking or music, she was a perfectionist to the core. We would spend hours discussing the finer points of a difficult *moorchana* of a raga or about the process of making a particular kind of chutney. I must admit she would often lead when it came to the former.

Coming from North Karnataka, where the *thali* is a riot of colours with our various kinds of chutneys and pickles, I would often dig out ancient recipes from my memory to satisfy her curiosity. Whenever I was in their house, she would insist I make the groundnut chutney in our style.

She had this big thing about the old, painful memories which she kept locked away in her heart. "Those are the only real treasures I have," she would say. "They help me keep my feet firmly on the ground." Like little girls, we would spend endless hours chatting about old times. We would end up crying or burst out laughing as we recalled the foolish things we had done.

I have nothing to say about the "dynamism" of today's classical musicians, who think that adapting their style to today's needs is essential to win the hearts of music lovers. It is one issue I have consciously kept away from. But I have a strong belief in the purism of music. This was the result of Moghubai's influence -- she steadfastly refused to court popularity by being betrothed to the current modes of music.

She had a rule: *dhrupadiyas* should sing the *dhrupad*, *khayaliyas* should sing *khayals* and *thumri* singers should stick to the *thumri*. "*Sagli khichdi keli kahich dhad jamat nahin (If you mix them all, you won't be good in any genre),*" she would say.

It was from her that I developed a passion for the *khayal gayaki*. Despite the popularity that the *thumri* was attaining, she steadfastly refused to sing it even once. Even when offers for concerts dried up and the family would be forced to go through lean, difficult patches, she resolutely stood by this rule.

She would never suffer a compromise, preferring austerity to the heaven of popularity. This specialisation saw her *gayaki* develop great levels of *layakari* and *bol-taans*. The rhythmic element of her *gayaki* took you into a different world, it was as if somebody was pouring nectar into your ears -- the *swaras* blending with the *laya*... their presence strongly seen in the *alaapi*... in the unfolding of lesser known ragas. When she sang, the *swaras* would never obscure in the huge web of *taans* and *bol-taans*.

As a little girl, she was being groomed to play Vasantsena in the musical *Mircchakatika* - a masterly Marathi adaptation of the Sanskrit original. Chintoba Gurav from the drama company had taught her the popular song, *Maadivari chal ga gade*. She grew so fond of the song that she would sing it constantly. Ustad Alladiya Khan from the Jaipur *gharana* heard her sing as he was passing by and was impressed. He offered to train her and she learnt under him for over 25 years, till his death in 1946.

It is the loss of this beauty of the Jaipur *gayaki* style which hurts the most. What comes as a consolation is the way she instilled the same rigorous discipline in her daughter, Kishori. Let me put on record here that the mother may not have had any of the fiery

aggression of her daughter, but Kishori has managed to retain her mother's mellow introspection.

Moghubai abhorred film music and Western music. "*Evdhe aishwarya aapplyach ghari asthana kahshala dusryanacha ushta-karkhada ka patkarava (Why should we seek others's leftovers, when we have such a treasure trove in our own house)?*" she would ask.

When Kishori rendered the title song of *Geet Gaya Patharon Ne*, her mother was livid. She resorted to a hunger strike for three days and ate a morsel only after she extracted promise from Kishori that she would never sing for films again.

Truly, the life of this *gaantapaswini* is a study in rare ambition, sincere hardwork and *gurubhakti*.

The legendary Gangubai Hangal spoke to Leela Pawar for rediff.com.