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Namashkaaram!! Here comes Part XI of the Great Masters series. Once again the feature is taken from G.N. Joshi's book "Down Melody Lane".

Rajan
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pp 154-162 of Down Melody Lane
My Guru Gunidas
by
G. N. Joshi

Jagannathbuva Purohit - 'Gunidas' - was my Guruji. It is very difficult to express on paper my feelings about him. He was kind and honest to the core, and possessed a wealth of new and rare musical compositions. He was very richly gifted, yet he called himself 'Gunidas'- servant of the gifted ones. It was unfortunate that I met him so late in my life. For 10 years I enjoyed his company and we became so close that I regarded him as one of my family. I respected him, stood in awe of him and yet we were bound together by unbreakable bonds of love.

I do not quite remember where and when I first met this great man. I think it was around 1956 when I had gone to Manik Varma's house in Pune. He used to come there from Kolhapur a few days every month to give her tuition. Later, when Manik settled in Bombay he started coming to the city. The fragrance of his music and his teaching-skill attracted many eminent singers of Bombay to him -- including Ram Marathe, Jitendra Abhisheki. Suresh Haldankar, Balakram, C. R. Vyas and Pandit Yashwant Joshi. He found it very tiring to commute between Kolhapur and Bombay every month. He was faced with the problem of finding enough time to teach his disciples in Kolhapur and his ever increasing number of disciples in Bombay. To settle in Bombay was almost impossible owing to the extreme shortage of accommodation. It was very difficult to find a place to live without paying a large premium.

I met him again at this point in his life. I was so strongly attracted by his personality and his teaching technique that I decided to have him to stay with us. For more than 3 years I had searched in vain for a proper guru from whom I could gain a wider knowledge of music. Most of them wasted their time in big talk without giving away any real knowledge.

Guruji was a pleasant surprise. Instead of always demanding paan or cigarettes from me, he was more interested in finding out what dishes I liked and cooking those for me and for his disciples. He was equally liberal in imparting knowledge. He was prepared to offer his entire treasure of knowledge to his disciples - they only had to have the capacity to receive and imbibe what he gave. I offered him a room in my house but he declined and said, 'I am always entertaining all sorts of people, and that too at any odd hour. I shall stay in Bombay only if I get an independent place in which to live.' Since I was determined to keep him in Bombay I began to hunt for a place for him. As luck would have it, at about the same time, a two-room tenement in a chawl next to my house Rageshri became vacant. The owner was a very good friend of mine. He and his sister were lovers of music and they agreed to oblige me, and thus Guruji got a place without paying a premium and was soon established in the two rooms.

Guruji was a loner, without any relatives. He never married, and therefore had no family obligations. Being a very good cook, he had no need to depend on anybody for meals. Among his disciples were two brothers, Balakram and Trimbak Jadhav. They came every morning to help Guruji. They would do everything from sweeping the rooms, washing the clothes and storing water to all sorts of odd jobs. Every morning this pair came to our house to grind masala. 'Guruji is having a number of guests today; we are preparing vegetable pulav', or 'We want to grind some chatni.' My wife observed to her surprise that the masala for grinding contained 10 to 12 hot green chillies every day. She felt that it was very harmful to eat such hot meals every day and told me to speak to Guruji, but I refrained from doing this out of reverence for him. The next day she herself cautioned Guruji about the harmful effects of eating such hot stuff every day. He held my wife in great respect and hence did not contradict her.

Guruji had a lively sense of humour. He did not like the fact that we, as Joshis, supposed to be vegetarian Brahmins, were in practice non-vegetarians. He had a novel way of showing his disapproval of our dietary habits. He would come to my house in the evening, go straight to the kitchen and announce, 'I am tired of eating vegetarian food, I will stay for dinner only if you have chicken.' My wife is very religious and hence we observe a strict vegetarian diet on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. She would answer him in the same jocular spirit - 'Guruji, today is Thursday, but how lucky you are, we are having a vegetarian chicken today. I am sure you will relish it.'

Whenever Guruji went to Kolhapur he brought back with him the famous brinjals which are grown along the banks of the river Krishna. Therefore the two or three days after his return were brinjal days for us. Only those who have tasted this seedless variety of brinjals will know the delectable flavour they have. Stuffed and eaten with a jawar roti they taste so good that they would put to shame even a lunch at the Taj Mahal Hotel.

A year later my elder daughter was married in Pune. Guruji participated in all the arrangements as if he was one of the family. A number of eminent singers and musicians were present at the wedding lunch. Panditrao Nagarkar, Hirabai Badodekar, Saraswati Rane and several other very popular performers of the day, voluntarily offered to sing in the wedding pandal the same night. This was the night of 2nd January 1959. It was bitterly cold. Shrimati Hirabai Badodekar was the first to sing. The sweet voice of this nightingale of Maharashtra brought such warmth that the listener became oblivious of the cold. Artist after artist followed, to the delight of the wedding guests. The last to perform was Guruji. It was 5.30 in the morning. It was still dark and extremely chilly outside where the early morning dew and mist had covered the earth.

Inside the pandal, listeners were glued to their seats, intoxicated by the nightlong enchanting music. Guruji began with a composition in raga Ahir Bhairav, Tero jiya sukh pave. The entire gathering came under the hypnotic spell of this morning melody. An hour sped by and the first rays of the sun brought the beautiful dawn that came as if riding on the sweet notes. And thus came to a close the memorable 'Rangili Mehfil' in Pune.

Guruji always liked to be surrounded by his disciples, fellow artists or admirers. He was never tired. He would toil every day from 5.30 in the morning till 11 at night and then while lying down to rest he would listen mostly to broadcasts from Pakistan on his transistor. Strangely enough Guruji, who was popularly known as the Sun of classical music, listened with great delight and interest to ghazals and the lilting songs broadcast from the Lahore and Karachi radio stations. Next morning he would report to me that he had heard a very enchanting thumri by Ustad Nazakat Ali or a very romantic ghazal by Mehdi Hassan.

Wherever there was talent he appreciated it, and showed it in encouraging words to the artist. He was most particular to ensure that his disciples sang independently in mehfls. This was very advantageous. Firstly, the up-and-coming disciples lost their stage fright, and secondly they learnt how to put over their performances independently, displaying their imaginative skill and creative ability.

Whenever any disciple of his was scheduled to sing on the radio, Guruji would not relax till the programme had been broadcast successfully. The contract forms for radio engagements are usually sent to artists two or three months in advance. The artist is required to fill in the names of ragas and other items which he or she proposes to sing, and return the forms immediately. When such forms reached his disciples they used to be filled in under Guruji's guidance. He took particular care to see that his disciples presented new ragas and compositions for every broadcast. After this, regularly, until the day of the programme, Guruji saw to it that they rehearsed the ragas and compositions in his presence and were well prepared for the broadcast. On the day and time of the broadcast, no matter where he was, Guruji managed to tune in and listen attentively. He would carefully note all the good points as well as the flaws in the performance and would correct the flaws later with mild admonitions. He never discouraged anyone because he firmly believed that through such mistakes one gained maturity. Whenever a programme was arranged for Guru Purnima or for the anniversary of his guru Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan, he drew up a schedule showing the order of the items with their details for every one of his disciples. He made sure that each one sang some new composition to perfection. More than the disciples, Guruji was so concerned about this that he put them through gruelling rehearsals. His enthusiasm knew no bounds - it was as if he himself was to be put to a test for public approbation.

Before starting to teach a new raga, he explained the aroha avaroha, vadi-samvadi of the raga and then he impressed the pakad (catch phrase) and chalan (movement) of the raga on the mind of the disciple in such a way that the disciple, once he understood all these details perfectly, could easily master the cheez or bandish, and present the complete raga picture independently.

For this reason he never grafted the exact intonation of his gayaki onto the students. He believed that each voice had its own peculiar natural characteristics and that each disciple should learn to develop and present a raga in a style suited to his own natural tendency. It is observed that the particular style of gayaki in the Agra gharana usually resulted in many of its followers developing a dry, dull, colourless voice. But this did not happen with Guruji's disciples. He guided them to develop and nurture their individual style of presenting a raga. He taught them to pour their personalities into the rendition. The outstanding feature of the Agra gharana is a very fascinating layakari. Guruji particularly desired that his disciples develop this technique of layakari in their own individual patterns. Thus every disciple of Guruji always stood out in any assembly of musicians and displayed individual craftsmanship. The disciple thus learnt to depend on his own wings to enjoy flights in the atmospheric region of notes and rhythms. Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khan did not in his life time allow his son to sing independently. As a result Munawar Ali, though gifted with the makings of a first rate performer, failed to impress in his solo performances after the death of the great maestro.

Guruji was ever eager to kindle the spark of creation in every disciple. This enabled the student to carve his own artistry and to hold a mehfil confidently on the strength of his individual talent and merit. This is why disciples such as Manik Varma, Jitendra Abhisheki, Ram Marathe, Vasant Rao Kulkarni and C.R. Vyas became known for their individual style of gayaki, and gained popularity.

Guruji was also an expert tabla player. Mr. Gaitonde, popularly known as Bhai Gaitonde, owes his proficiency on the tabla to the coaching of our Guruji.

Guruji disliked the presence of an outsider during the tuition hour. He was very particular that his as well as the pupil's concentration should not be disturbed by such an intrusion. At times he was very blunt with intruders and therefore incurred the displeasure of many. He would not hesitate to admonish his pupil, irrespective of his position, age or status. This hurt the pride of many, but I realised that he did so out of a genuine desire and love for the proper grooming of his disciples and I for one did not mind such reprimands.

Guruji had an endearing affection for all his pupils. If one promised to come and did not turn up he would immediately feel concerned about the person's health and, as soon as he could, he would go to the pupil's residence to see for himself that all was well with him or her. His reverence and love for his own guru, the late Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan, is almost legendary. While in Bombay they would invariably meet every day. But later, when Khan Saheb moved to Delhi, they could only meet through letters. If either of them was late in replying the other became so nervous and restless that on many occasions such delay took away their desire to eat or even sleep. The pangs of separation from his teacher prompted Guruji to console himself by creating expressive compositions. During such periods of anguish, he wrote many bandishes. The following composition in Raga Ahir Bhairava confined to a rhythm in Ektaal is an instance on the point.

Beg beg aavo mandir

Bahot dinana beete

Soojhat na kam kaj

Nisdin ghadi ek pal

Gunidas ko daras

Deeje ab, Pranpiya

'Pranpiya' was the nom de plume of Vilayat Hussain Khan. He wrote his compositions under this name, while Guruji wrote his under the name 'Gunidas'. Vilayat Hussain Khan was a profound scholar. He had memorized hundreds of ragas and bandishes, and Guruji ceaselessly tried to master as many as he could. Khan Saheb died very suddenly at Delhi. Guruji heard the news at Kolhapur over the radio and for many days mourned his passing away. Like a child who has lost his parents, Guruji wept openly and ceaselessly for the Khan Saheb. During his lifetime he observed the late Ustad's death anniversary unflinchingly, paying rich musical tribute to him, and saw to it that his disciples did the same. This kind of love and intense devotion between the guru and his disciple are rare.

Guruji was very religious. During the Ganapati festival his enthusiasm and excitement were very noticeable.

Guruji appeared to be a gruff and hard person but behind this rough exterior was hidden a very sentimental tender heart. Only those who

spent a lot of time with him experienced his loving and soft nature, and once drawn to him they remained so permanently. Guruji was therefore always surrounded by admirers and friends. All these did not necessarily belong to the sphere of music. People from all walks of life came to him. Famous writers like P. L. Deshpande, the late H. R. Mahajani, politicians like Balasaheb Desai, tycoons like Mr. Lohiya of Kolhapur, poets like Vinda Karandikar, film stars like Sulochana and Sharad Talwalkar, doctors like Dr. Bavadekar, the famous orthopaedic surgeon or Dr. Phalnikar - all these came to enjoy a dip in the ocean of music.

Anyone who met the eminent journalist, the late H.R. Mahajani, would wonder how such a crude and rough looking person could strike up a friendship with an artist like Jagannathbuva. But Mahajani, too, like our Guruji, only had a rough exterior that hid a music loving, sentimental nature. As a faithful friend he was worried about Guruji's future. He had tremendous influence and pull with the Government of Maharashtra. He was known in the ministerial group as 'Shastribuva'. Guruji's name was recommended by Mahajani to Balasaheb Desai who was then the Home Minister. Thanks to Balasaheb and Mahajani, the Maharashtra Government soon announced a life pension of Rs. 400/- per month to Guruji.

Guruji had a progressive outlook. While young, he had the opportunity to accompany the Yuvaraj of Mysore on a tour of Europe and England. The late Govindrao Tembe was also with them. Jagannathbuva was a strict vegetarian and teetotaler. Therefore, during the tour abroad, he never touched liquor or meat - and not even eggs.

He sometimes told us of the toils of his own student days. He had to wash the dirty clothes of his guru's wife, had also to arrange for his guruji's liquor supply, and prepare and serve non-vegetarian food. He did all these things because he was possessed with the sole aim of learning music. In contrast with this, his treatment of his own disciples was very liberal and progressive.

Very often he said to me, 'I feel that my days are numbered. So learn as much as you can from me.' I very much wanted to take advantage of this generous offer, but because of my ever increasing responsibilities in H.M.V. it was not possible for me to go to him when he had the leisure to coach me. I met him too late in my life - when I was already over 50. At this stage I had no ambition to hold mehfilis or earn applause. Whatever I learned from him was for my own satisfaction. Therefore I could do riyaz only in my spare time. I was free in the evenings or at night but Guruji had important and lucrative tuitions at those hours. Therefore we could not find an hour which was mutually suitable. I always said to him, 'Guruji I am due to retire soon. Then we will have a competition as to whether you give me more, or I take more.'

In my heart I really desired to sit at his feet and have a serious Sangeet Sadhana. Destiny however willed it otherwise. Even before I got out of H.M.V. Guruji retired for ever from this world.

In late 1967, a function was held in Nagpur in his honour. While he was returning by train after the function his suitcase was stolen. He did not mind losing his money and other valuables, but his book of treasures containing rare and precious compositions collected during his lifetime was also gone. With the loss of this book he was literally crushed and from that day onwards became so moody and desolate that his health began to deteriorate.

On 4th October 1968 my daughter Jaya was leaving for America. Guruji was with a friend in the Shivaji Park area of Bombay for a rest. Jaya went to seek his blessings the night before she left. He looked upon Jaya as his own daughter. He expressed his desire to go and see her off. However, he was advised by the doctor not to do so. Later, on the 18th of the same month, Guruji came to my house. The next day was my grandson's birthday. Guruji was to go on that day to visit his adopted daughter Leela at the suburb of Dombivli, so he came over to bless my grandson on the 18th night. His usually lively countenance looked very tired. He called Abhi, held him close to his heart and gave him a present. When my daughter asked whether he felt strong enough to go to Dombivli he said, 'If anything happens, you will come to know.' I do not know if he had a premonition of his end. He took our leave, and that was the last time we saw him alive.

Very early the next morning Guruji left for Dombivli without meeting any of us. The following night, i.e., the 20th October, we were rudely awakened by the ringing of the phone. Bhai Gaitonde was speaking from Thane. He informed us that Guruji was in a serious condition. Shocked and stunned, I got in touch with others of our circle. We discussed whether to take doctors or an ambulance to Dombivli. We were perplexed as to why they had phoned from Thane instead of direct from Dombivli. We telephoned Dombivli and came to know that the great man had had a massive heart attack and breathed his last earlier that evening. We were numb with shock. I could not bear to look across my compound to his room. We - all his near and dear ones - went immediately to Dombivli where his mortal remains were cremated. The ties of friendship and love of over 12 years were suddenly snapped for ever. He had generously opened the treasure vaults of his musical wealth to me, but I was unlucky enough not to have been able to pick as much as I should have. The loss to me is irreparable and I still cherish fond and reverent memories of him.
