

From: Rajan P. Parrikar (parrikar@ferrari.Colorado.EDU) Subject: Jagannathbuwa "Gunidas" Purohit - Vamanrao's tribute Newsgroups: rec.music.indian.classical Date: 1999/01/08

From "Between Two Tanpuras" by Vamanrao Deshpande Translation by Ram Deshmukh and B.R. Dekhney First published November 1967 Jagannathbuwa Purohit "Gunidas"

by  
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Pandit Jagannathbuwa Purohit having completed sixty years is now in the sixty-first year of his life. He is a repository of a number of great qualities - exceedingly deep knowledge of music and willingness to impart it to others, devotion to his guru and deep affection for his own disciples etc. Several musicians have celebrated their entry into their sixty-first year. They were all greatly respected in their individual branches of music. However in Jagannathbuwa's case, there was no need to campaign for collection of contributions. As soon as news went round that there was going to be a celebration in his honour contributions came in pouring on an astonishingly large scale. I should not be surprised if this was the first celebration of its kind to bring in voluntary subscriptions on such a large scale.

The very first thing that occurs to me while thinking about Buwa is that he is equally popular or respected throughout the various, sometimes discordant, layers of the world of music. He is equally at home in the company of scholarly music teachers like D.R. Deodhar and S.N. Ratanjankar, mehfil stars like Kumar Gandharva and Bhimsen Joshi, actor-singers like Suresh Haldankar and Ram Marathe or amateur singers like Baburao Joshi and G.N. Joshi. Besides, he is greatly admired by his numerous disciples spread all over in Bombay, Pune and Kolhapur. Obviously, he must be an artist of considerable stature. Naturally the persons belonging to these different layers make different demands on him. Some might be looking for a pleasurable conversation with him in which music figures prominently while others look for deep analysis of a particular raga. Some are collectors of bandishes of diverse origins. Some are fond of technical discussions. And disciples, of course, wish to continue to drink at the ever fresh fountain of his musical knowledge which does not dry up even after years of tuition. Unless a person has all the qualities expected of him he cannot achieve popularity in such diverse circles or, having earned it, retain it successfully. It is not enough to be a successful mehfil-performer - the person must be a capable artist and a capitalist in the sense of having a large fund of technical knowledge or a large repertoire of cheejs. In olden times 'capitalist' singers of this type were called Kothiwale (Literally those who have a large store-house of cheejs) singers.

It is true that Buwa has an enormous stock of musical knowledge and cheejs made by different people at different periods. But in addition to that he has another special quality - his extraordinary creativity. The ragas and new compositions he has created are being enthusiastically learnt and taught. I wonder whether he has himself counted how many cheejs he has composed, in conventional ragas and ragas newly created by him, but I am sure they are at least 101. Why I say this is that sometime ago when some Kolhapur friends wanted to honour him, Buwa categorically told them that he would not attend any such function until he had composed at least 101 cheejs. Some of his compositions, e.g., Soogar bara payo (raga Jog-Kauns) or Sakhi mandarwa me (Bihagda) or Bega bega awo mandir (Ahir Bhairava) and many others have proved so popular that many renowned singers frequently sing them in Mehfiles or they can be heard being sung on the radio every day.

New compositions are not created merely because there is a will and an effort to create them-there must be inspiration behind them. A discussion of why or how such inspiration occurs would be out of place here. A number of cheejs never get completed because the composer does not know how to complete them. In some the sthayi (first part) is ready but the antara (latter or higher-key part) proves elusive for years. With some cheejs, the opening portion is composed but the rest of the cheej defies creation. All in all, the number of complete cheejs is rather small. Besides, the new composition must be neat and attractive; it must have a beautiful face, it must move attractively, its words and phrases must blend well with the rhythm and it must be playful and gay. It will be dear to a large number of singers only if it passes all these tests. Otherwise it would be consigned to some neglected and forgotten corner.

All Buwa's musical offsprings, having passed through the various tests, not only vie with each other in beauty but they are also all chaste and have the classical ring. Their extraordinary popularity with singers is proof of their own attractiveness and it clearly establishes Buwa as a very successful composer. He was extremely particular in regard to his compositions - he did not regard a cheej as complete or teach it to his disciples unless he had himself sung it in mehfiles and was convinced of its perfectness.

The depth of his knowledge and extraordinary capability can be traced to his discipleship of great teachers in his youth. This training began in his early childhood and all his teachers were Muslims. Indeed Buwa had been so much under their influence that at first sight most people would be inclined to class him as a Muslim. He really belonged to a priestly Karhada Brahmin family; but since he was ten, he kept constant company with Muslim musician-teachers and indeed considered himself fortunate to be able to serve them. Buwa does not know where his priestly family originated or how many generations ago it emigrated to Hyderabad. But his entire childhood, youth and some of his middle age were spent in Hyderabad. He never married, so he never had any family ties. His mother died so early that he was too young to remember the event; his father died when Buwa was in his tenth year. While his father was still alive, Buwa received some elementary Marathi education, that is all! Otherwise he had no formal education whatsoever. For thirty or thirty-five years of his life, he had moved in purely Muslim circles; all his friends and acquaintances were Muslim musicians. It was but natural that he should have been steeped in Muslim culture. Really speaking, he should have been called 'Jagannath Khan,' rather than 'Buwa' or 'Pandit'.

And truly he has the bearing of someone who was born in a family of a long line of respected Muslim musicians. It might be more appropriate to say that he belongs to an aristocratic Muslim mould. His only education was in music and that too not with ordinary singers - he was taught by several singers of great renown from the age of eleven or twelve until quite recently. The teachers included Mohamed Ali Khansaheb (Sikandara Gharana), Tanras Khan's son Umrao Khansaheb and his son Sardar Khan and nephew Shabbu Khan, Bashir Khan (Gudiyana Gharana), Ghulam Mohamed Khan (Tilwandi Gharana) and finally Vilayat Hussein Khansaheb (Agra Gharana). The list itself is so impressive that any singer would be overawed by it. This is the secret of Buwa's successful music career. This is not a biographical treatise and I have no intention of going into its details. But it must nevertheless be said that very few people are so fortunate as to have received training for so many years from so many outstanding masters of music. He learnt accurate intonation from some; he picked up alapi from someone; he learnt bol-upaj from someone; kheencha-tani from someone else and adi-didi i.e., fast fractional movement, from yet another. And from everyone he picked up cheejs of different composers and different types. The surprising point is that all those renowned maestros were kind enough to impart them to him. Buwa, astonishingly enough, picked up all this knowledge despite his abject poverty. Buwa amassed all these riches on the strength of his ability to serve his preceptors. He possessed this quality in abundance and still does.

In Buwa's youth, Hyderabad had a large number of talented artists such as the ones mentioned above except Vilayat Hussein Khan. (Buwa's father too was apparently a music-lover. Buwa recollects his father leading him by his finger to the mehfiles of these Muslim singers as a child. The father must have really been fond of music otherwise why should he, an orthodox Brahmin belonging to a priestly family, frequent Muslim houses?) One thing Buwa knew was to render personal service to the Khansahebs. He had to do everything that goes with domestic service

such as running errands, washing clothes etc. and also do all the 'bandobast' where his masters' predilections were concerned. Buwa had to become an expert in procuring cannabis, hashish, opium, other narcotics, toddy, liquor etc. whenever called for, and the rest of the paraphernalia. Buwa's expertise in these matters is sound enough to train any young hopeful who may be inclined that way. The only astonishing thing is that Buwa himself remained completely untouched by these vices. A server is all the more trustworthy and popular if he is himself free from vices. The credit for not falling a prey to these vices goes not so much to Buwa as to the Vedic orthodoxy of his family background. The important point is that although he had to handle liquor and things like that every day, he had full control over his own palate and his mind. Even his worst enemy cannot accuse him of having any vices. Being able to provide such services selflessly made him popular with his teachers and he could pick up everything they had to give. It is worth mentioning that the name 'Gunidas' (under which pen-name he composes his cheej) was not chosen by him but by his Muslim masters. They used to say - "You are really a Gunidas - a worshipper of merit!" And the name stuck. Buwa, too, began to use it in his compositions.

Buwa and I became acquainted about twenty years ago at Kolhapur when one evening Govindrao Tembe introduced us. On that occasion I had given a fair rendering of Jaitashri. I was also somewhat conscious of my musical prowess and the rigorous training I had taken. There was also a priggish inner feeling that I was way out of Buwa's class. ("What is he going to sing after my performance?"). It was Buwa's turn to sing next and in the very first rhythmic cycle of his Maru Bihag he completely floored me. Even today, I consider the manner in which, in that particular raga, he vaulted from sa to ri, to be debatable. That apart, I was enchanted by the design of the cheej, skill of presentation, alapi in which words of the cheej figured and by his boltan. Even today I find his boltan very beautiful. To arrive at the climax purely through the boltan, i.e., without having resort to emotional voice modulation and an ascending pattern of notes, seems to be a special feature of his style. We became friends in this first meeting and I also had the occasion to enjoy his hospitality. In the meetings that followed he sang for me numerous cheej from little known ragas and he even passed on some of them to me by way of keep-sakes. Out of these I vividly recall a dhun (tune) from raga Shubhri Gouri to this day.

Apart from the journeys he had to make for appearances in mehfil Buwa frequently moved his residence from place to place - Hyderabad, Pune, Kolhapur and finally Bombay. He has considerable experience of the film industry having worked in the music departments of Chhatrapati Cinetone, Hans Pictures, Shalini Cinetone and other film companies. In Atre's film Brahmachari, he even sang an arati 'Satrane uddane' along with the now famous G.D. Madgulkar. He was on terms of great intimacy with Govindrao Tembe and in many of his films he liked officiating as his deputy or to conduct rehearsals of the music staff, help Govindrao in composing songs, attend the recordings and participate in music practice with him. It was Govindrao who introduced Buwa to the Court of Yuvraj of Mysore and took him along when the Prince and his retinue went on tours of England, France and other European countries. These trips broadened the sum-total of Buwa's experience and gave him a new outlook.

I have, of course, no personal knowledge of Buwa's early life at Hyderabad spent in the company of his great Muslim teachers. But during the last twenty or twenty-five years (counting from the time when Govindrao introduced us) I have met him fairly frequently. This was his 'Vilayat Hussein Khan period' which was noted as much for his own fulfilment as for a model of relationship of teacher-disciple tradition in the world of music. The saint poets wrote devotional songs for their deity: Buwa used his own medium for the worship of his guru. In terms of intensity I, at any rate, cannot see any difference between the two types of devotion, except that saints worshipped their God and Buwa equally devotedly worshipped his guru. In the former case, the devotion was expressed in abhangas or ovis (Metric form used principally for devotional purposes), in the latter it was expressed in a bandish, i.e., in a musical form. One has a literary value, the other a musical one. Buwa devotedly showered bandishes on Vilayat Hussein Khansaheb as one showers flowers; in the same way, Khansaheb pleased by the devotion of his disciple, blessed him by composing bandishes of his own. The tradition was handed down from Buwa to his disciples and they began to compose bandishes dedicated to Buwa. The bandishes came from the same mould as Buwa's own. Indeed had they not carried the names of the disciple-composers they could have been easily mistaken for Buwa's creations. Buwa's disciples showered him with bandishes and Buwa, pleased with his disciples' devotion, returned the offerings with bandishes of his own. I give below a few samples without any further comment.

Buwa becomes restless, anxious on hearing that Vilayat Hussein Khansaheb is ill at Agra. He is particularly anxious because there is no letter from Khansaheb. He does obeisance to God and offers a prayer in the form of a composition:

Raga: Abir Bhairava Tala: Ektal

Sthayi: Tero jiya sukha pawe  
Nisa dina mere gunavanta/

Antara: Binati Prabhuse 'Dasaguni' ki  
Juga juga jiyo mere pran //

What the composition means in brief is that - "I, Dasaguni, i.e., Gunidas (Buwa's nom de guerre), pray to God that my 'Pran' (Pranpiya is Khansaheb's nom de guerre in bandishes) recover and live for countless years." Having said as much, Buwa is convinced that Khansaheb is better and prays to Khansaheb in the same raga: "You are well now, so let me see you soon."

Raga: Ahir Bhairava Tala: Jalad Ektal

Sthayi: Bega bega awo Mandir  
Bahut dinana beete/

Antara: Soojhat kachhu nahin mohe  
Nisa dina ghari pala chhina  
'Gunidas' ko daras deej  
O Pranpiya //

The meaning is - "I am restless day and night, every minute, every second, etc. You are well now, so O Pranpiya, come and see me soon."

I do not want to give too many examples - one should be enough. I did not select it deliberately - it was a random sample. Most of Buwa's compositions come from the same mould. Now let us take a look at Khansaheb's return greetings:

Raga: Patadeepak Tala: Ektal Madhya laya

Sthayi: Saach gurananaki sewa

Karat wohi pawe samadhan

Antara: Prembhakta 'Pran' kahat  
Sun ho 'Gunidas'  
Ya dowu jaga me prabhu  
Fohedeta badho nam

Briefly the meaning is as follows:

"I, Pranpiya, say this to you Gunidas; listen - one who serves his guru he alone gets real satisfaction. Similarly it is my wish that you get increasing fame in both the worlds." (There is no third-nether-world among the Muslims.)

Another cheej of the same sort (which I cannot recall now) was sung by Buwa on the radio at Bombay when Khansaheb was ill. Khansaheb heard Buwa sing it. When Buwa called on him, Khansaheb, until then completely confined to his bed, suddenly stood up. The two met in a hearty embrace. The eyes of the guru and the disciple were filled with tears; neither was able to speak. Finally Khansaheb, unable to control himself, said, "Buwa! Even my own sons did not do what you have done for me." With that Khansaheb once again broke into tears.

I shall now give a sample of a cheej composed on Buwa by one of his disciples [the composer is C.R. Vyas "gunijAn" - RP]

Raga: Malav Tala: Jalad Ektal

Sthayi: Toohi rangila mera  
Karat jo hoo ranga  
Gunidas tumahi so paya/

Antara: Gane mein rasapran ko tumahi apanaya  
soN diya Janaguni ko barnee na jaya  
anmol tihari maya //

Meaning: "You alone are my Rangila. Whatever little 'rang' I have acquired is, Oh Gunidas, through you. That 'rang' you obtained from your guru, i.e., Vilayat Hussein Khansaheb and gave it to us. No one can describe your great compassion and affection. It is priceless." This is what the disciple writing under the pen-name of Gunijan (in ordinary life C.R. Vyas) says.

Another composition from Vyas:

Raga: Nata Bhairava Tala: Trital

Sthayi: Suraj chanda jab tak phire  
Saban tore nam sumiran kare/

Antara: Gunidas tum kiyo  
Amar dhun sach sapta surana me  
Sunat sab log Janguni mana hare //

Meaning: "As long as the Sun and the Moon shine in the sky people will remember the immortal tunes you have composed. i.e., Oh Gunidas, you have composed such tunes in seven notes (i.e., in music) as captivate the hearts of music lovers as they do the heart of Gunijan (i.e., me) too."

Buwa returns the compliment by a composition offered as blessing to his disciple:

Raga: Jog Tala: Rupak

Sthayi: Mora ladala, nahin gunan mome  
Kahe karat mose neha/

Antara: Kahat Gunidas suna ho Gunijan  
Jawo vahin jahan vidyadhana payo  
Tero sacho guru 'Rajaram' //

Meaning: "My dear disciple, why do you love me so much when I have no great merit? I, Gunidas, say this to you: Oh Gunijan - one who gave you so much wealth of learning for so many years, viz., Rajaram (i.e., Rajarambuwa Paradkar) is your real guru."

That is enough of these samples. There is no end to this exchange of compositions and musical dialogue between Buwa and Vilayat Hussein Khan and Buwa and his disciples.

Note: After reading about the musical conversation between guru and disciple in the above article, readers should not reach the mistaken conclusion that the meaning of cheej has any great significance in music. A cheej is not literature or poetry, it is a bandish. When a bandish is sung the expression of musical quality pushes the verbal meaning into background; it is drowned by music and rightly so. It was the same in Buwa's music. The verbal meaning of a cheej at the most establishes a certain mood; once that happens its only function is to step back into the wings and let music hold the stage. The writer thought it necessary to add this note lest anyone felt that what he has said here contradicted statements made by him on this subject elsewhere,

Finally, on this auspicious occasion while offering my best wishes to Buwa, a thought occurs to me which I shall share with you before I close. Most of the well-known singers, male and female, who are under forty, are Buwa's disciples. The list includes a galaxy of musicians like Ram Marathe, Suresh Haldankar, Jitendra Abhisheki, C.R. Vyas, Balakram, Jitendra Dhanal etc. who vie with each other in excellence. Similarly there are female musicians like Manik Varma, Malati Pande, Poornima Talwalkar etc. All these disciples have enhanced Buwa's fame. Buwa really started his music career as a tabaliya (percussionist). He had received training from the late Thirakawa Saheb and Amir Khansaheb and had made a name for himself as a tabaliya. He has a host of disciples in the percussion field as well. Out of these, Gaitonde and Nana

Mule are in the limelight. Prof. B.R. Deodhar happened to make an observation the other day which is rather pertinent in this context. He said the teacher's artistic talent draws inspiration through the instruction he gives to capable disciples - it is really they (the disciples) who make their guru great. There is no doubt that Buwa's disciples have added to the knowledge and fame of their preceptor and inspired him. But there is a further stage beyond this. A careful observer can easily see that Buwa is gradually moving towards it. This last stage is particularly arduous and difficult to reach. It involves being accepted as a guru by all other contemporary singers. Every era has to have a great singer who is treated with the respect due to a guru by all top performers in mehfilis of that period whether or not they have received training from him. This ultimate guru is rather like a Reserve or Central Bank which guides other banks and comes to their rescue in times of need, in as much as he acts like a guidepost to all contemporary singers. He can only do this if he has a rich experience of countless mehfilis, an immense collection of cheejis and a sound judgement with which to analyse the nature of ragas and other qualities. It is only if a person possesses all these qualities that he can perhaps attain such supreme position and that too after he has crossed sixty or sixty-five years of life. In my knowledge the late Alladiya Khansaheb adorned such a position of the guru of all singers. After him Faiyaz Khansaheb held this honoured position and later Vilayat Hussein Khansaheb. Buwa is moving in the same direction and he is undoubtedly endowed with the necessary knowledge, talent and analytical ability. Before closing my congratulatory piece I, therefore, express the hope that Buwa, in the evening of his life, may acquire such a position at an early date.

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