



SHANTA GOKHALE SEPARATING THE BEST FROM THE BANAL ON MUMBAI'S CULTURESCAPE

Hindustani delight

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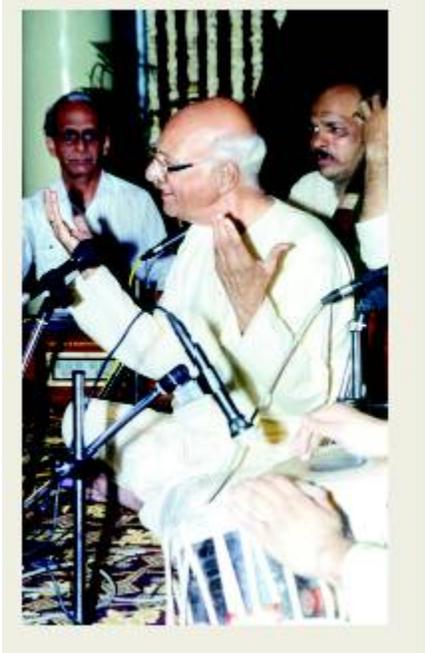
Pandit Jal K Balaporia has passed away. With his going we have lost one of the few dedicated practitioners of the Gwalior gayaki in the city; and, after Pt Feroz Dastur's death four years ago, the remaining Parsi vocalist of Hindustani music in the country. Pt Balaporia was only six when his father, Kaikhushroo, began teaching him raga-based songs. At 14, he joined the class that Sitaram Eknath Pandit of the Gwalior gharana had started in his home town, Billimoria. Even when he moved to Surat and later to Mumbai, he found gurus from the gharana to guide him.

If one were to characterise in a word, the effect that Pt Balaporia's music had on his listeners, that word would have to be delight. The delight lay in his chaste diction, whether he was singing in Braj, Sanskrit, Marathi or Persian, in praise of Shiva, Rama or Allah. It lay in the warm rapport he built with his audience. It lay in his delight in all three aspects of music — poetry, swara and tala. Some of the talas that his bandishes were set to, like deepchandi, ada chautal, zhaptal, zhumra, sawari and pashtu, rarely showed up on other concert platforms. What we heard there were mostly trital and the excessively slow ektal. The latter, in Pt Balaporia's opinion led to slackness in the construction of the khayal.

“Tala is not just a set number of beats struck at regular intervals,” he would explain. “Had it been so, why would our great composers have created three independent talas like ada chautal, zhumra and deepchandi, each comprising 14 beats? The uniqueness of a tala lies in the varied lengths and tension between two beats. In the slow ektal, the lazy spaces between beats destroy the potential for a musician to create playful relationships between word, swara and tala. Only by honouring all three can you fill your music with emotion, melodiousness and balance.”

Balance constituted a fundamental precept in his training. Balance is achieved when a presentation is not stretched beyond the point where the singer has said everything there is to say for the moment. Balance is achieved when the singer makes judicious use of all eight ornaments of elaboration available to her/him, never overdoing any one of them. Balance is achieved when the singer pays due regard to the wholeness of a bandish, singing both the asthai and the antara. Eliminating the antara is like building a house without a roof.

Significantly, one of the comments on Pt Balaporia's Yaman tarana on YouTube expresses wonder and excitement at hearing the antara of the tarana for the first time.



While Pt Balaporia’s students admired him for the purity of his music and were grateful to him for his gentle guidance, what claimed their profound love were his qualities as a human being. Affectionately known as Jalsaheb, Pt Balaporia was a transparently good man who lived by the three precepts of the Zoroastrian faith — good thought, good word, good deed. Strongly centred in his faith and his music, he could do what less secure souls never could — laugh at himself. His funniest stories were about his experiences as a performer on All India Radio. On one of these occasions his name was announced as Pt Bal K Jalaporia. Passing a hand over his bald head, Jalsaheb remarked mischievously, “I don’t know where the announcer saw bal!”

Pt Balaporia’s generosity towards his students was endless. On one shelf of a cupboard in the room where he taught them, was a stack of fat, well-thumbed notebooks filled with bandishes he had inherited from his mentor, Dr H G Moghe. “I have so much to give, but who is there to take it from me,” he would ask. With their limited time and stressful work schedules, none of his students could commit themselves as completely to music as he had done.

He himself had all the time for them, and his beloved wife Roshan, all the warmth and hospitality. At the guru poornima last year, even when his degenerative illness had made his voice inaudible and movement difficult, Pt Balaporia sat through his students’ musical offerings, listening intently, his fingers doing what nobody could stop them from doing — tapping out the talas on his knees. I have absolutely no doubt that, even in his final unconscious state, he must have been singing a *tappa*, a *khayalnuma* or an *ashtapadi* to himself, delighting death itself as he had delighted us.

Courtesy : Dara Acidwalla