

# SHRIKRISHNA NARAYAN RATANJANKAR

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*Note—Padmabhushan Pandit Shrikrishna Narayan Ratanjankar died on February 14, 1974 at the age of seventy-four. This article is in humble homage to the multifaceted genius of one who gave himself entirely to the cause of music.*

It is a unique coincidence that Shrikrishna Narayan Ratanjankar was born on December 31, 1900, just after the stroke of midnight even as the nineteenth century was being rung out, yielding place to the twentieth. This was a period of an all round awakening and revival. In the field of music, a climate of keen and active interest in the art and science of music and a deep concern about the preservation and propagation of India's invaluable musical heritage had already been created by the dedicated efforts of Pandit Bhatkhande and Pandit Paluskar.

Shrikrishna's father Narayan Rao, an employee in the Bombay C.I.D., was an erudite scholar of Sanskrit and Marathi. A fairly good sitar player, he was a discerning lover of music with a deep regard for India's glorious cultural traditions and learning. This family environment played a significant part in the formation and development of Shrikrishna's personality and character, inculcating in him an idealistic approach to life, devotion to serious pursuit and learning and a determination to be of service to the country.

The father noticed with satisfaction that his second son Shrikrishna had a very sweet voice and an extraordinary talent for music. Motivated as it were by some providential prompting, he decided to provide Shrikrishna an opportunity for receiving best and all round training in music. Thus, at the age of seven, Shrikrishna was put under Pandit Krishnambhat Honnawar, a pupil of Ustad Kale Khan of the *Patiala Gharana*. Within two years, the brilliant and talented pupil attained amazing mastery over the musical material i.e. subtle and perfect *swarajhana*. Subsequently Shrikrishna learnt for some time from Pandit Anant Manohar Joshi, a disciple of Pandit Balkrishnabua Ichal-

karanjkar of the Gwalior tradition. By quick strides he learnt prominent *ragas* and authentic *khyal* compositions with *gayaki*.

It was at this stage that a common friend brought Pandit Bhatkhande to Ratanjankar's place to listen to the child prodigy. Bhatkhande was deeply impressed by the boy's performance and the exceptionally high level of his musicianship at the tender age of nine. To test him further, he asked the boy to sing the twelve notes of the gamut consecutively which the boy did very well with amazing mastery. The guest made encouraging remarks and made a gift of a packet of sweets to the boy. Ratanjankar cherished the memory of this first meeting with Bhatkhande recapturing the childlike wonder and excitement of the imposing and yet affectionate personality of the important caller who was to shape and direct the course of his entire career and life.

By this time (1909) Bhatkhande's unceasing quest and efforts to collect the rich materials and relevant facts regarding the practice and theory of music had taken concrete shape. On the basis of an intensive and analytical study of these, he had consolidated his ideas for the reorganisation and resystematisation of the music that was prevalent. His valuable works had already started coming out in print. He was gathering momentum in his multifaceted task of installing the art and science of music in their rightful place in the total perspective of the cultural, academic and social life of the country. He was intently looking for someone with extraordinary artistic and intellectual capacities to shoulder this gigantic burden and carry out his master plan.

Shrikrishna's father had developed a respectful regard for Bhatkhande's achievements and noble aims. At his instance Bhatkhande took upon himself to impart comprehensive training in music and musicology to Shrikrishna and groom him for full participation in his scheme for the betterment of music. He now realised that this boy of thirteen was a genius, had a highly cultivated family background and was the answer to his call.

Thus began a life-long master-disciple relationship which was to make an epoch-making contribution to the cause of Indian music. Under the enlightening and inspiring influence of Bhatkhande, Shrikrishna made a deep and analytical study of the vast treasures of Hindustani music and also acquired a thorough grounding in the historical and musicological aspects.

For acquisition of further achievements in practical learning and concert techniques Ratanjankar was sent up by Bhatkhande to Aftab-e-Mousiqui Ustad Faiyyaz Khan the versatile renowned Darbar musician in the service of Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gayakwad of Baroda. As a formally accepted disciple of this great Ustad, Ratanjankar received training under him for full five years. This was an extremely rewarding opportunity for Ratanjankar. The Ustad was happy with this gifted pupil whose grasp and execution were excellent. Ratanjankar benefitted immensely by the opportunities he was given to sing

with the Ustad in his private and public performances as also at the Durbar Mehfiles. In fact these formed a prominent feature of his training even more than any regular lessons which were comparatively few. The Ustad always remained proud of this pupil whom he affectionately called Shrikishan.

Ratanjankar came down to Bombay from Baroda in 1922. Hereafter Bhatkhande carefully initiated him into the problems and techniques of teaching music to classes in a systematic and fruitful manner. Ratanjankar attended important and pioneering music conferences conducted under the able direction of Bhatkhande at which prominent musicians and musicologists of the country came together and deliberated on the practical and theoretical aspects of music and where important decisions regarding forms of some of the *Ragas* as also on other aspects had been arrived at. This experience added a new dimension to his knowledge and vision. In the meantime, Ratanjankar was pursuing his academic studies and in 1926 he graduated from Wilson College, Bombay University.

Ratanjankar now emerged fully accomplished as an outstanding performing musician, a learned scholar, an able teacher and an educationist with a sense of dedication to the noble cause of spreading the divine message of music throughout the country.

At this juncture, Bhatkhande's long cherished proposal to establish a premier institution for systematic dissemination of musical training and knowledge assumed concrete shape and with the help of some wealthy and influential music lovers and connoisseurs, Marris College of Hindustani music was started at Lucknow under the direct control of Bhatkhande. For entrusting this institution embodying his own vision, Bhatkhande considered Ratanjankar singularly and eminently suited. After two years of professorship, Ratanjankar was installed as Principal of this college.

With this started a new chapter in Ratanjankar's life.

With a missionary zeal and conscientious approach, Ratanjankar identified himself with the college and earned for it a position of supreme prestige and country-wide reputation. During his regime Marris College came to be considered a premier institution for a comprehensive study of the practice and theory of Hindustani music. Ratanjankar was the life-breath of the institution and gifted and talented enthusiasts from all over the country came over to Lucknow to learn under this great master.

His technique of imparting training was characterised by utmost clarity in respect of *raga* exposition and compositional structure. Phrase by phrase he analysed a *raga* giving a comprehensive idea of its potentialities. On this solid foundation rested the edifice of his improvisation and elaboration. Ratanjankar made special efforts to present complex ideas in a rational and

simplified manner. Added to this was his brilliant and imaginative style of singing. His classes became so popular that students eagerly looked forward to these. In fact during his evening classes large crowds stood outside the classroom listening spellbound.

Apart from teaching to classes Ratanjankar was always available for inquiring students seeking individual guidance. His single room apartment was a veritable ashram of a learned *rishi* where *sadhana* and quest for musical knowledge and beauty were always welcome, knowledge imparted and guidance given. While hundreds of students passed out from Marris College mentioning with pride their association with this renowned personality, there are over fifteen persons who have had the good fortune of receiving individual guidance and training from Ratanjankar. Some of these have earned reputation as musicians and scholars and are holding responsible positions in Government as well as Universities and other organisations.

Ratanjankar laid due emphasis on the practical aspect of music. Weekly demonstration sessions became a part of regular activity at the college. Students were given opportunities to perform before audiences, and members of the staff and Ratanjankar himself demonstrated and performed for the benefit of the students.

All along Ratanjankar was engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship. He wrote several learned articles and books, read papers and delivered lecture demonstrations. For over four decades, he was a prominent figure at seminars and conferences.

Ratanjankar was recognised as an eminent authority on Hindustani music. His advice and active co-operation was sought by Universities, Public service commissions, All India Radio and music institutions and organisations all over the country. With a sense of duty and moral responsibility he was always willing to lend his services to the furtherance of the cause of music in all its avenues. This entailed long train journeys which he thoroughly relished as opportunities for doing his work undisturbed.

As a creative composer Ratanjankar occupies a foremost position. He has to his credit over five hundred compositions covering a wide range from *Dhrupad*, *Khyal*, *Tarana*, *Tappa* to entirely new innovations, published in three volumes of *Abhinava-geeta manjari*. There are compositions in extant *ragas* revitalising the essential *raga* form and unfolding new angles; there are some to interesting mixed *ragas* like *Sawhi-Kedar*, *Hem-nat*. By employing the accepted principles and processes of *raga*-creations he created entirely new *ragas* indicating rare combination of intellectual and artistic genius. In adopting *ragas* of the *Karnatak* a system like *Charukeshi*, *Basant Mukhari* to the Hindustani idiom, Ratanjankar imparted a new beauty and perspective to them. He was fascinated by the *Varnam* of *Karnatak* music which he felt

was also helpful in preparing a solid ground work of *swara* and *laya*. On the pattern of South Indian *Varnam* he composed *Varnams* which can be considered a common ground between the two systems. Among his compositions there are lovely songs in Sanskrit. Some of his *Tarana* compositions have a Sanskrit verse with appropriate thought content in the second movement (*antara*). *Tala-lakshnageeta* is a new type of composition devised by him. Ratanjankar wrote three full-fledged operas. These were produced on the stage and also recorded and broadcast from All India Radio. Several of his compositions gained wide currency. As a composer he has made an enriching contribution to the world of music. According to Ratanjankar, folk tunes of the various regions have a basic relationship with *ragas* of the sophisticated and origin of music and many *ragas* have been traced in folk tunes. In support of this he used to demonstrate several folk tunes employing the notes of *ragas* like *Gaur Sarang Des, Phadi, Mand*. He was carrying on research in any possible connection between the ancient *gatis* 18 in number and the 18 folk tunes popular in different regions all over the country. He undertook tours of regions like Bharatpur in Rajasthan and Mandi Suket in the Himachal Pradesh; analysed the tunes and derived inferences.

A broadcaster of eminence — right from the inception of AIR, Ratanjankar regularly appeared in its programmes. He figured in prestigious and important programmes like the Music of India, National Programme, Sangeet Sammelan, planned by AIR. With a pair of pupils providing the Tanpura drone and vocal support, Ratanjankar's programmes were noted for their rich musical content, chaste and clear of exposition and freshness of approach. Unlike many reputed platform singers, his repertoire was large and varied. He enjoyed equal facility whether a *raga* was well-known or lesser known, simple or complex. Very often his radio and other programmes provided him inspiration and opportunities for composing new *Dhrupad* or *Khyal* or *Tarana Bandish* and even new *ragas*. His music bore the stamp of his scholarship and creative imagination. His illustrated talks and appreciation programmes were invaluable in creating an atmosphere of discerning interest and enhancing the level of music appreciation, among lovers of classical music. He applied himself seriously to AIR's assignment to prepare a Radio dictionary for music. Although incomplete, the material prepared by Ratanjankar under the project and deposited in AIR's archives is a valuable documentation consisting of verbal descriptions accompanied by actual demonstrations of *raga*, forms and musical techniques.

The Vice Chairmanship of the Music Audition Board set up by All India Radio in 1952 was a most difficult, delicate and vulnerable position beset with controversies and antagonisms. Ratanjankar rose to the occasion and with the cooperation of the members of the Board he accomplished the challenging job to the best of his ability and judgement. He did a similar job for Radio Ceylon at the invitation of the government of Ceylon. As the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Indian Music at Khairagarh, Ratanjankar established that institution on a sound footing.

Ratanjankar's high and varied achievements and his selfless devoted services came to be acknowledged and high honours were conferred on him. In awarding him their highest degree of Sangeetacharya (D.Mus.) Bhatkhande Sangeet Vidyapeeth and Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwa Vidyalaya earned honour for themselves. In 1957 the title of Padmabhushan was bestowed on him. As a token of their high esteem and regard for Ratanjankar, Madras Music Academy bestowed on him unique honour by naming him distinguished and eminent musician and scholar. He was elected Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. To mark his completing of 60 years, an elaborate celebration programme was organised by his pupils, well-wishers and admirers. Glowing tributes from prominent personalities were received, commemoration volume brought out and a music festival held at Bombay.

During the last years of his life Ratanjankar was associated with Vallabh Sangeet Vidyalaya as its honorary Director. He was persuaded to accept this by Swami Vallabh Das, a pupil of Ustad Faiyyaz Khan and head of a Vaishnavite sect who held Ratanjankar in the highest esteem and regard.

Enshrined in a short, thin and frail physique, Ratanjankar was a towering genius combined with an austere nobility of spirit. He lived and died in a heavily laden harness. Only a few months before his death, in an ailing and bedridden condition he completed a book in Marathi on theory of music. Through his lasting and manifold contributions to the cause of music, Shrikrishna Narayan Ratanjankar will live as a guiding and inspiring light.

#### APPENDIX

#### WORKS OF PANDIT RATANJANKAR

##### A. Published

1. *Tan Sangraha* in three parts covering 45 Ragas.
2. *Abhinava-Geeta-Manjari* in three volumes containing over 500 compositions, a wide range of the various musical forms of Hindustani and Karnatak music as well as some entirely new creations of his own.
3. *Varnamala* — Collection of Varnam compositions in Sanskrit on the pattern of South Indian Varnams.
4. *Tal-Lakshngeet Sangraha*—Collection of compositions embodying the *lakshnas* or the various *talas*.
5. *Govardhan-Uddhar-Opera* in Brij-Bhasha.
6. *Hindustani Sangeet Ki Swaralipi*—monogram on Notation system for Hindustani music.
7. *Sangeet Shiksha* — 3 parts.
8. *Abhinava Sangeet Shiksha* — 2 parts.
9. *Sangeet Paribhasha* — book in Marathi on theory of music.
10. Ratanjankar commemoration volume-Part III. Articles and Research Papers covering a wide range of topics and aspects of Indian music.
11. Bhatkhande — (National Biography Series).

**B. Unpublished**

1. *Shiva manglam* — Opera in Sanskrit based on Kalidasa's 'Kumar Sambhava'. Staged at Kalidasa Samroha, also broadcast from AIR.
2. *Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi (Pranahuti)*—Opera in Hindi (Khadi Boli).
3. *Chatur Dandiprakashika ka Hindi Anuvad.*
4. *Swaramala Kalanidhi ka Hindi Anuvad*
5. *Sangeet Ratnakar's Swadhyaya and Ragadhyaya*—critical review in English.
6. *Lakshya Sangeet Karika* — Commentary in Sanskrit on Bhatkhande's Sanskrit treatise *Shreemallakshya Sangeetam.*