

# Musical treasure trove

A PROGRAMME of devotional songs was presented by the National Centre for the Performing Arts in collaboration with 'Kalanirnay' on January 1. It marked the conclusion of the Dharmageet Mahotsav held at the Tata Theatre.

1991 marks the completion of 700 years of the *Dnyaneshwari*.

The *Dnyaneshwari* is universally acknowledged as an outstanding work which occupies pride of place from both a philosophical and literary point of view in Marathi literature. The Warkari cult, that has a tremendous following all over Maharashtra, draws inspiration from it. Namdeo, Eknath, Tukaram, Sopandeo and Ramdas were among the saints who strengthened this Bhakti movement in Maharashtra.

The ramifications of the Bhakti cult were felt in the field of art and literature too. The Bhakti movement flowered in every conceivable direction. As far as music is concerned, it triggered off many new musical forms. This was the ground on which the performance was based.

Dr Ashok Ranade, the well-known ethnomusicologist and Assistant Director of the NCPA, who has carried out painstaking research in this area stumbled upon a musical treasure trove—the bewildering variety of musical and rhythmic forms generated in the wake of the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra from the 9th century onwards. "Unfortunately, much of the tradition, being oral in character, has been lost down the ages", he laments.

"The old books mention as many as 51 types of *geet*. But with a herculean effort we could trace only 17. When the Muslims invaded Maharashtra, their invasion extended to the field of music too. Sufism became a potent cultural influence as the saints were not merely exponents of philosophy but were composers and lyricists as well. The *geet* developed as an appendage of the philosophy expounded by the particular saint", observed Dr Ranade.

P L Deshpande, the writer-

**Amarendra-Nandu Dhaneshwar attends Devgani, a programme of devotional songs at the NCPA, and provides a historical perspective on their evolution**



Sant Namdeo gave the Bhakti cult impetus in Maharashtra

thespian who co-compered the show underlined the crucial importance of music in religious matters and social life. "The Indian religious ethos is conducive to music. Bengal has its bouli mendicant singers while Rajasthan has its sufi singers. In the *Geeta*, Lord Krishna applauds his singing devotees. Saints like Ramdas, Kabir, Meera and Tukaram spoke of the virtues of music. Religious feeling underlies carnatic music even today," he said.

The programme of songs was immaculately designed by Dr Ranade. The earliest pad of Marathi written by Raja Some-  
shwar in 1130 was rendered by

Ranjana Joglekar. The *ovi* is basically meant to be hummed and has no definable taal though it may have a laya. Uttara Kelkar sang the *ovi* in an ancient tune akin to the raag Jaijivanti. A chaupadi dating back to the 13th century, written by Damodar Pandit was sung by Sharad Jambhekar and Kedar Bodas. Significantly enough, the tune was in the raag Sarang.

An *Abhang* is a series of *ovis* in a single string which is unbroken. The crystallisation of the *ovi* into the *abhang* was explained. The *Bharud*, a multi-coloured song, accompanied by dancing and acting was sung by Shivrambuva Worlikar, the

veteran bhajan singer.

Ranade also offered some startling facts about Dasopant, a 16th century saint. "He was thoroughly well-versed in the language of music and he composed 1600 pads. If one tries to analyse them one finds at least 76 raagas and a number of taals. They include diverse musical forms such as *chaturang*, *trivat*, *tarana*, the *palna* and so on," he said.

It was pointed out that as many as 65 deities, to whom aartis are addressed, can be identifiable. An aarti is a ritualistic song which is so accommodative that it affords even non-singers a chance to exert their vocal chords. Interestingly, the sufis professing Islam also adopted the regional musical idiom along with their own idiom. The compositions of Nipat Niranjan, a 17th century Sufi saint were presented by Sharad Jambhekar. A *Riwayat*, akin to the mersia a plaintive Islamic religious song, penned by a Muslim poet Ashgar, was sung in Marathi by Shruti Sadolikar. A *Virani* is a song of separation in which a devotee complains to the Lord for inflicting suffering on him or her while a *gavalan* is a song describing the pranks of Lord Krishna. Marutirao Bagde, sang a *gavalan* in his inimitable style. Dr Ranade said that the *gavalan* is also described as a song through which control is established over the senses.

Sant musicians employed a wide variety of taals for their devotional songs. Rare taals like Ardha Matta taal, Chautaal, and Deepchandi were heard at this concert.

The commentry by P L Deshpande appeared to be the major attraction for the largely Maharashtrian audience that thronged the auditorium.

The programme, however, did succeed in throwing light on the evolution of musical forms. For those who came for the entertainment, there were enough songs and light-hearted fun. The programme was a good mix of education and entertainment.

## But where was the *bhakti rasa*?



Dr Ashok Ranade (left) sang a composition set to a *taal* of nine beats while Marutirao Bagade gave a dramatic touch to his singing.— Pictures by Anushree.

By AMBARISH MISHRA

'Dev-gaani'  
Tata theatre  
January 1

THE National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) welcomed the 1990s with 'Dev-Gaani', a well-planned concert of devotional songs at the Tata Theatre on New Year's day.

Billed as the grand finale marking the conclusion of the five-day 'Religion and Music' festival which had included sufi and *baul* songs, *ashtapadis* *haveli* music and *qauwalis*, the programme was produced in collaboration with Kaal-Nirnay, a leading publishing house in commemoration of the 700th birth anniversary of Dnyaneshwar, the saint-poet of Maharashtra. Devised and compered by P. L. Deshpande, well-known humorist, playwright and honorary director of the NCPA and Ashok Ranade, noted musi-

cologist and assistant director of the Centre, it drew a full house.

Taking a close look at the fast-dying tradition of *bhajans* and *abhangs*, the concert drew from the rich reservoir of devotional songs made immortal by medieval saint-poets like Tukaram, Eknath, and Namdeo, sufi and Mahanubhav bards whose message of brotherhood, humanity and *dharma* cut through the barriers of creed, language and faith.

Well-known artistes including Sharad Jambhekar, Shruti Sadolikar, Uttara Kelkar, Ranjana Joglekar, Kedar Bodas, Shivrambuwa Worlikar, the doyen of the *warkari* tradition and Marutibuwa Bagade, presented 17 compositions in all, most of them uncommon, interspersed with commentary by Deshpande and Ranade.

While the programme bore the distinct stamp of Ranade's scholarship and painstaking research, sadly it did not evoke the expected mood

of *bhakti* for a variety of reasons. As many of the compositions were unheard of, the audience could not identify with the *bhav* or the *rasa*. Also, the stress was mainly on showing off the *tayyari* with singers like Jambhekar and Bodas indulging in *taanbaazi* with free abandon. Both Bodas and Jambhekar seemed keen to outdo each other while singing 'Jaise tarang saagara re'.

Uttara Kelkar and Ranjana Joglekar marred the mood of sobriety with their high-pitch tones that often

### MUSIC

turned shrill. However, the former proved her singing abilities in 'Padile door deshi', a *virani*. Similarly, Bodas acquitted himself creditably with his 'Nidhaan nirguna', a soulful composition in raag Shree.

Worlikarbuwa could have surely chosen a better *bharud* than his tepid 'Vrudhapani sasubai' that ambled along in a dull manner. One won-

dered if *buwa* found himself out of place in the plush ambience of the Tata Theatre. The doyen was not in his element, by any reckoning.

Marutibuwa Bagade, on the other hand, drew prolonged applause with his 'Gadyano, raja ki ho zaala' rendered with gusto and dramatic effect. However, having heard Marutibuwa a number of times in the last few years, one has invariably felt that he often tends to slip into showmanship, particularly when he begins to expound the theme of the *abhang* in the style of Anup Jalota.

Shruti stole the show with her *rivayat*, a lament for a lost child. A gifted singer of the Jaipur-Atrali *gharana*, she sang her heart out in the Abdul Garib composition set in Pilu (with a touch of Gaud Sarang, was it?), to a *taal* of nine *matras*. Ranade's 'Kamalachya skandhi', also in nine *matras*, was equally moving.

The 'Aamhi re kapadi' song-and-dance number was a let-down. The idea of having schoolkids dancing to the strains of the *bhajan* did not

create the necessary impact. Also, the children hardly had any space to act out their movements as the stage was heavily encumbered with too many artistes.

Mention must be made of Anant Kunte for his melodious sarangi and of the young *pakhwajia* Pratap Patil who played with exceptional strength as the Gandhi-capped *warkaris* danced to the beat of *lezims* at the start.

While the concert provided the much-needed counterpoint to the present-day crisis of hope and emphasised the concept of true *dharma* at a time when zealots and obscurantists are gaining ground rapidly, 'Dev-Gaani' needs to be pruned and chiselled. Ranade could have chosen a simpler composition of Kabir than the tongue-twisting 'Jag se hatkar...'

The final *pasayadaan* by Worlikar and Bagade evoked a true feeling of devotion, moving even Bhakti Barve-Inamdar, known for her restraint in acting, to tears.

## IN CONCERT

Religion and Music  
Ashok Ranade  
Dharmageet Mahotsava  
Little Theatre  
Dec. 28

**T**HE Dharmageet Mahotsava was a feast of academic lectures and discourses in the mornings and some engaging music recitals from different parts of India in the evenings.

The function got off to a flying start with a scintillating discourse by Ashoke Ranade, an expert in Indian classical music and a writer of numerous books who is currently assistant director at the NCPA.

Many were the facets of music and religion which Ranade had to impart to his audience, with a number of witty and humorous anecdotes thrown in. Thus while talking of music, he made it clear that it was not only the classical variety with which we were concerned, but also numerous other forms like devotional, film music and so on.

A theme dear to Ranade was the linkage between musicality and religiosity. With his usual analytical approach, he was able to prove that a deep study had revealed some common characteristics like the ritual, the magical, the emotional, the intellectual and so on which made the subject most exciting.

For example, the ritual element was present in religion with a number of symbols like *dhooop* incense, ringing of temple bells etc. The intellectual element was there in music with its rules and regulations, which are laid down for the delineation of *ragas* and *tal* as in *shastraka* where they had been spelt out in detail while in *shastriya sangeet* there was a lot of improvisation left to the performer.

It was refreshing to be told that man had an inner craving both for music as also religion even if he was not an expert on the subject, or even if he was an agnostic where his personal beliefs were concerned. For music and religion yielded a unique kind of experience of life which people obtained from a synthesis of these two

# Devotionally yours



intensely satisfying personal themes.

Said the speaker, in the final analysis, both religion and music aimed at releasing an individual from the trammels of life.

Folk Music and Religion  
Komal Kothari and others  
Dharmageet Mahotsava  
Little Theatre  
Dec. 29

**K**OMAL Kothari gave an illuminating discourse on the folklore and folk music of Rajasthan. The speaker, a doyen of this art, has documented the performing arts of the region and studied the musical instruments and oral traditions of the state thoroughly.

The role of the wandering minstrels of old in Rajasthan is widely known.

While entertainment in villages was few and far between, the purveyors of folk music played a significant role in their lives, and fulfilled an impor-

tant need in an otherwise arid life. It was these people who gave them an insight into the ever-popular epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Some of these ideas were highlighted by the learned speaker.

Among his other points: apart from the paeans of praise which they generally showered on their kings, they also showed a spirit of rebellion against them as also against certain established social and religious orders.

How were the children, trained in this art? Quite simply, not in any formal manner but often in the lap of the parent who played on a rustic instrument. This then became a tradition, a kind of a *parampara* in which the guru was not an outsider like an *ustad* but the father himself.

R. T. SHAHANI

Haveli Sangeet  
Vithaldas Bapodara and others  
Dharmageet Mahotsava

been composed by the eight saint poets known as the *asta chap-kavis*, the *asta sakas*, (friends) of Lord Srinath Kumbandas, Surdas, Parmananddas, Krishnadas, Govindswami, Chittaswami Chatrabhujdas, and Nanddas.

Recently when the NCPA held a musical festival on music and religion *haveli sangeet* in which both religion and music are given equal importance featured rather prominently. The leading exponent of the *parampara*, Vithaldas Bapodara sang some of the traditional kirtans in the classical *dhruwad* style in his rich resonant voice. Vithaldas Bapodara, the fourth generation *haveli sangeetkar* in his family explained "Dhrupad as prevalent in *haveli sangeet* may be said to be in its purest form unlike other forms of *dhruwad* that have been transformed by the influence of Muslim traditions. We rigidly follow the raags in which the kirtans have been set," he added.

Bapodara concentrated on *Utsav Sangeet* accompanied by the *mridang*, *bansuri* and *jhanj* (cymbals). The *haveli sangeet* encompasses songs composed to herald different seasons, in praise of different moods, to denote the different time-cycles, festivals etc. and interestingly the accompanying instruments change accordingly. The *nityapat kirtan* which are an everyday ritual are sung only to the strains of the *tanpura* and the *Vasant Dhamaar* songs sung in the month of *Phalgun* to celebrate Holi are sung to the accompaniment of a host of instruments from the *dhól mridang* to the *upang* and *sarangi* to add more colour and vigour to the music.

There are just 100 odd exponents of this genre and to Vithaldas Bapodara goes the credit for striving to create an interest in this dying art form. His recordings of *haveli sangeet* are regularly relayed on AIR and he has been organising seminars and workshops on the subject too. Residing presently in Kalbadevi he teaches *haveli sangeet* to more than 100 students

A.T. JAYANTI

Tata Theatre  
Dec. 30

**A**BOUT 500 years ago, Shri Valabhacharya saw a vision of Lord Krishna in the form of Srinathji on Govardhan parvat. It inspired him to build a temple on the spot and his followers soon came to be known as Pusti Margis.

Unlike other religious sects, Pusti Margis conduct their worship not through chantings but through kirtans and this Pusti Margi *sangeet* came to be more popularly known as *haveli sangeet*. All Pusti Margi temples are in spirit representatives of Lord Krishna's father's palace — Nandrajji ki Haveli — hence its name, *haveli sangeet*.

The songs are mainly sung in Vrajbasha, the language of the birth place of Lord Krishna. Though sometimes the songs are sung in Sanskrit, Vraj which is closest to Hindi is the more accepted medium. *Haveli sangeet* has



DEVGANI and Baithakichi Lavni will possibly be the most curious music programmes in the city this week.

Devgani is self-explanatory, meaning 'songs about God'. What is going to be different about these devotional songs is that their strains were composed and sung hundreds of years ago.

"We know only one type of

backward on the evolution of music.

"India has actually five categories of music," he explains. "Sadly, only the classical, which forms five per cent of the total body of music, is recognised. There is primitive, folk, devotional and art music."

The lyrics in this type of music are of special importance, being composed by singer-saints, a

## RHYTHM REWIND

Step back a hundred years or so. Into a realm of music past

God-song, if we may call it so," says Dr Ashok Ranade, assistant director, (research and ethnocentric music) at the National Centre for the Performing Arts. "But I realised that several types existed, at least 56 of which I have identified. I have

### A STAFF WRITER

recreated about 16 to 20 of them, dating from 1131 AD."

Ranade's task must have been rendered all the more difficult, in view of the fact that these systems were not written down in notation form. Everything is by conjecture, studies of lyrics and form working

phenomenon almost exclusive to India.

More interesting perhaps, is going to be Ranade's other research-based presentation, Baithakichi Lavni. Baithakichi means drawing room. "This is a type of music like the thumri," explains Ranade. But unlike the thumri, this genre has not been taken up by performers today.

The form, which evolved in the 1740s under the Peshwas of Pune, and ended somewhere in the 1920s was also popular in Bombay, Satara and other cities of Maharashtra.

Here too, nothing was written



Ashok Ranade... back to the future

down. But Ranade tried to reconstruct the music from old 48 rps records owned by private collectors, and also from several living artistes in the state who were trained in the form.

"I learnt the form myself," says Ranade. And have now taught it to my team of presenters, all young vocalists with a good grounding in classical music.

Even the best of them took at least four months to trill Baithakichi Lavni. "It is the type of singing that is different," explains Ranade. "It uses different *talas*, although, like many other light forms, it is based on a very flexible *raga* system, following what we may call the shadow of a *raga*."

Some of the compositions are sung solo and others by groups of vocalists. "Also noteworthy is the high literary quality of the lyrics," says Ranade. Lyrics have been drawn from different anthologies of poetry.

This is the ninth of Ranade's

SAVITA KIRLOSKAR

research-based presentations. We cannot tell whether it will be of entertainment value in the flamboyant sense. But both programmes are certainly a must-see for the serious musician. We would even recommend it to those experimental music buffs.

We hear so much about our heritage of music, muses Ranade. What is the use of simply talking or reading about it? It is time we performed it.

*Devgani, Tata Theatre, today at 6.30 pm and Baithakichi Lavni, also at the Tata Theatre, tomorrow at 6.30 pm.*



# FEATURES/THE ARTS

**T**HERE ARE certain questions which echo in the minds of passionate lovers of classical music at some point or the other. Simple ones about the origin of music, the distinction between harmony and melody, the role of rhythm, as well as complex questions about the survival of the music system, the multifarious interpretations it leaves itself open to, the relationship between music and other disciplines of life, the role of music, if any, in shaping an individual's personality and so on.

An instant understanding of Hindustani music is rare indeed. Even birth in a music-oriented family does not guarantee this. It usually begins with an inexplicable gut-level relationship. Honed in the right direction, it develops first into an appreciation of the art, and later an understanding that is, to an extent, personal. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's *darbāri*, therefore, evokes varied emotions in people who understand the *ustād's* music and those who don't.

When music transcends the limits of entertainment and stimulates intellectual thought



Uttara Kelkar (centre) with Shruti Sadolikar at the uplifting *Devganj* festival

accept it through the back door. The conclusion of Ranade's thesis was lucid: "Musicians use religion to become better musicians while religious people use music to become better religious thinkers. Musicians who were not particularly religious have often made calculated legitimate use of it to further their music". Ranade clarified that his thesis did not offer definite conclusions, but food for thought.

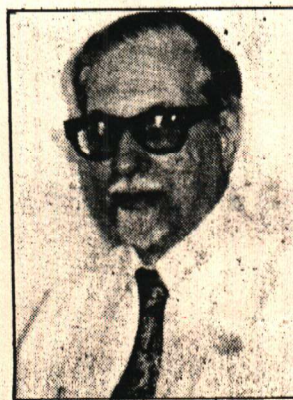
The stimulating thought process set in motion by Ranade was carried forward by the Prof Sheryar Ookerjee, whose reviews of Western music grace the pages of *The Independent*. Incidentally, Ranade was Ookerjee's student at Wilson College, though neither music nor religion, Ookerjee hastened to add. The gentle professor of logic addressed himself to the question: What does music composed in a specific religious context mean to people who are either unaware of the context or are not particularly religious?

Ookerjee was of the opinion that the listener simply suspended his disbelief momentarily if shutting his eyes to his o



Dr Ashok Ranade: "Musicians use religion to become better musicians"

## Divinity in music



Prof Sheryar Ookerjee: "Religious music is enjoyed by people who are not even religious"

Does the musical calibre of Tansen, Swami Haridas, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, and more recently, Kishori Amonkar and Kumar Gandharva stem largely from the power of their religious beliefs? **Smruti Koppikar** on the NCPA's Dharmasangeet Mahotsav, which explored the intriguing relationship between religion and music

processes, complex questions arise. The relationship of music with other disciplines like religion perhaps the most intriguing of all, due to the sheer complexity and multiplicity of answers.

The National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) organised a Dharmasangeet Mahotsav last week in an attempt to explore the relationship between music and religion. Under the guidance of its director PL Deshpande and assistant director Dr Ashok Ranade, the four-day *mahotsav* offered fare which held appeal for everybody, no matter what their level of musical understanding.

The inaugural lecture by Ranade himself was from a musician's point of view. And he wove so intricate a tapestry of the relationship that Brahma himself must have been satisfied. Ranade's sojourn with the subject has been long: from modest beginnings with the All India Radio as a musician, he became associate

director in the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology of the American Institute of Indian Studies, which offered him scope to integrate his study of Indian music and religion.

It was no mere coincidence, he said, that *naadbrahma* and *parabrahma*—the Indian concepts of music and religion respectively—are rhyming words. Both the disciplines of life aim at freeing the individual from mundane ties and personal confines. "Their combined behaviour is so durable and varied that it cannot but suggest an inner relationship," he argued.

Quite a few saints have had intense relationships with music while many a musician has shown shades of sainthood.

One wonders about the legends that surround Tansen, Swami Haridas and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, and whether their musical prowess had anything to do with the power of their religious beliefs. Contemporary musicians like Kishori Amonkar and Kumar Gandharva, to mention only two, freely admit the relationship they have with music is parallel to the one they have with God.

All saint-poets were either musicians before they became saints or they were saints who became *acharyas*, Ranade pointed out. Musicians need not ipso facto be religious, but they have a deeper involvement with music than, say, actors or dancers.

The universality of both

music and religion, Dr Ranade continued, arise from characteristics they both share: rituals, mythology, institutionalisation, emotional experience and revelation. And religious facets—magical, sacrificial, idolatry and devotional—manifest themselves in music so significantly that each religious aspect has musical sounds particular to it that cannot be used for another. Again, there are religious feelings that find satisfactory expression in musical responses alone.

In fact, Dr Ranade went so far as to suggest that Marxism and humanism failed to become religions, as we understand the term, because they made no room for music, while religions which rejected music had to

sceptical point of view about the existence of God and religion. But, a more plausible answer lies in the fact that a non-believer shares the same joys and sorrows and humanity as a composer. Ookerjee referred to the compositions of Bach, Lutheran Christian. The words of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion, for example, refer to the Christian doctrine which is very specific in context. This piece can be enjoyed at a particular level of religiosity but listeners who are unaware of its background will also thrill on hearing it, said Ookerjee, as it cut across all religious barriers.

All great music is, in fact, religious, Ookerjee added, for a simple reason that it is an embodiment of human feeling—compassion or whatever—an upliftment of the human spirit. For just as religion has the power to take its followers to great heights, he said, so does music. In this sense, music is almost a religion itself.