

# Can disco, garba, pop and classical music co-exist?

**By Sudha Koppikar**

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CAN disco, garba, pop and traditional Indian classical music co-exist?

That was the topic that took centrestage at the birthday celebrations of Dr Ashok Damodar Ranade, organised by his disciples at Snehasadan, Pune on November 30.

It was in the second half of the programme, which consisted of a discussion on Culture and Art. The panel comprised Dr Shrirang Sangoram, Datta Marulkar, Satish Alekar and Prasannakumar Aklujkar.

Ranade said they can co-exist as each form evolves from the need of the changing times and situations.

But classical music, which has a very strong traditional base will still hold audiences, he contended.

"In ayurveda, the lifespan of

man is 120 years. So, though I'm 60, I'm still at the beginning of my musical exploration," he said earlier.

His students are planning a 'satkar' in Mumbai early next month. This is the perfect Gurudakshina for Ranade.

Kathak exponent Rohini Bhate and doyen of the Natyasangeet Jyotsna Bhole graced the occasion and handed over the mementoes on behalf of the organisers.

Ranade is a musicologist, scholar and vocalist and was formerly head of the music department of Bombay University.

He regaled the audience with a short concert and presented Mian Ki Todi and Tarana in the Gwalior gharana, Komal Ramkali and Bilawal thumri.

Can folk music like lavani be presented in the classical style, he asked and went ahead to render one that was earlier presented along with P L Deshpande.



TEN vials of attar is not something you would typically request a friend to pick up every time he went to Delhi. But that is precisely what Ashok Ranade wanted.

"So every time before I came back to Mumbai, I first made a trip to Chandni Chowk to pick up the attar," laughs Arun Tikekar, Ranade's long-time friend, who was then working in Delhi. Ranade was experimenting with the effects of different attars on the voice and body temperature.

"Come to think of it, I never did ask him about the outcome of his research," smiles Tikekar, who is now editor of *Loksatta*.

A little eccentric? Perhaps. But it is this sort of unrelenting intellectual curiosity that has propelled Ranade to become one of the most respected musicologists — indeed, cultural scholars — in India today. His unique workshops on voice culture, which draw from yoga, modern science and classical music, have produced some of the country's top talent.

Ranade turned 60 recently. Relaxing in his short-sleeved

# There's no such thing as Indian 'classical music'

Namita Devidayal records the contribution of Ashok Ranade, the radical musicologist who recently turned 60

khadi kurta and chequered lungi, he reflects on his life and work. His small study, in the Kala Nagar flat where he and his wife Hemangini live, seems to capture his modest, self-contained world: the cluttered desk facing a tree window; a chatai on the floor; rows and rows of books — in Hindi, Marathi, English, even Russian — lining an entire wall; the three tanpuras standing against another.

Looking down on the room is a sepia-toned photograph of a rather stern-looking, middle-class Maharashtrian man.

"My father was a great friend of Gajananrao Joshi," says Ranade. "They lived in the same chawl in Girgaum." Ranade started learn-



Ashok Ranade

ing music from Joshi when he was 10 — the beginning of what was to be a long, interesting career in music. "I decided very young, that I would develop the competence of a performer, but not earn my living from music," says Ranade, who eventually studied international law. "I realised that I would have had to compromise a lot as a performer."

And compromise is a word that does not figure in this man's

vocabulary. Over the years, he has

chucked up prestigious jobs and confronted employers, whenever there has been a conflict of interests. For instance, he stopped singing for All India Radio (AIR) because he felt they didn't respect musicians. A few years ago, he resigned from the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) when there was a problem over a theatre centre started by him.

"Ranade is very honest, and yes, it does get him into trouble sometimes," says Hemangini (who, in keeping with the charming irreverence that characterises this couple, has been calling her husband 'Ranade' since the time they worked together in AIR.)

Who else, for example would, in

such times, start a book with the idea that, "a study of the spread of Hindustani classical music comes close to shaking up the political map of India, as if in protest against the borders imposed on it!" (*Hindustani Music*, National Book Trust, 1997) Or, suggest that there is no such thing as Indian 'classical music' — it is a British definition.

But Ranade is confident in the belief that even with his sometimes unpalatable, distinctly original views, he has always found an audience. "What is more disturbing is institutions," he says, with a touch of regret. "People running cultural institutions do not have a vision, they do not trust the individual."

"I generally feel that individuals like to hear new ideas, even if it disturbs them," he smiles sardonically, eyes twinkling through his thick spectacles. Of course, it helps that Ranade's lectures and writings are always peppered with his inimitable humour. "You know, George Bernard Shaw used to say: 'People think I'm humorous. I'm only speaking the truth.'"



## Crossing the boundaries of tradition

There are probably only a handful of artistes who are both excellent musicians and scholars with a phenomenal knowledge of their subject, born of years of research. Of this handful, one name that stands out is that of Dr Ashok D Ranade, who has a formidable grasp of all things musical, whether it's pure classical, western, primitive, and also of theatre.

Felicitated in Pune recently on the occasion of his 60th birthday, Dr Ranade belies his age. Bubbling with enthusiasm, with a quick sense of humour and a ready smile on his face, he radiates the confidence that comes of knowing that his is a truly exhaustive career graph.

Dr Ranade was the first director of the University Music Centre of Mumbai in 1968, a post he held for 15 years, till 1983. In 1979, he was elected for the Caulson Indology Fellowship, Wolfson College, Oxford. In 1983, he was appointed associate director of the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology of the American Institute of Indian Studies, Pune. 1976 saw him being awarded the degree of Sangeetacharya by the Akhil Bharatiya Ghandharva Mahavidyalaya. And during this tenure, he was also associated with the NCPA, Mumbai, under the directorship of P L Deshpande. Both the archives at the Bombay University and the NCPA are a treasure trove of documentation on the arts, meticulously compiled by none

Ajay Deshpande

**Ajay Joshi** listened to renowned musicologist **Ashok D Ranade** speak on culture-specific music, the dying guru-shishya tradition and much more



other than Dr Ranade. He has authored numerous books on music and comparative studies, in Marathi and English, apart from several research papers.

Being a musicologist and critic, he has made a name for himself at Akashwani and Doordarshan where he is known for his wit and analytical writings.

All music is culture specific. Dr Ranade believes. To understand any form of music, whether Indian or otherwise, it is imperative to study the culture that has spawned it.

So culture came first, then art? Or was it vice versa? Both must have occurred simultaneously, said Dr Ranade, and thus neither can be defined in isolation. Environment must have an impact, but as far as music is concerned, Dr Ranade feels that the basics always remain the same. Defining a term that is much abused and much bandied about these days, he said that creativity, more often than not, is misconstrued. True creativity, he says, is when any artiste crosses the boundaries of tradition, to create and experiment. There is one aspect of western and primitive music that he envies. And that is the way audiences sing and dance along with the musicians, making a performer participate in a 'concert' rather than merely giving a 'recital' as he would in India. Perhaps it is our culture which keeps us from expressing our emotions so physically. Dr Ranade holds the guru-shishya parampara in high esteem and regrets the fast life of today where music is being taught in classes.

For many of us who have only heard him speak on music, listening to him sing (he has trained under Pandit Gajananbua Joshi, B R Deodhar, Laxmanrao Bodas and Pralhad Ganu, imbibing from them different styles of music and nuances of various gharanas) was the highlight of the entire felicitation programme. He started his concert with a composition (bandish) bichude maan in raga Miyan Ki Todi followed by a taranna. The beauty of this was that the raga showed shades of various gharanas. This was followed by a recitation in raga Jogsinduri. Here we got a feel of the raga Komal Ramkali created in the Rampur gharana, which is not heard very often. Next was the thumri, followed by an atypical lavni. He concluded with a composition by saint Nivrutinath, set to 9 beats. Only Dr Ranade, with his cross-cultural repertoire, could have brought to these typically classical compositions traces of the different gharanas, creating a unique effect.