

Interview of Nanasaheb Ghotankar

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Narayanrao Bal Gandharva is a highly respected figure in Maharashtra... Nanasaheb Ghotankar has worked with Bal Gandharva for about 22 years as an accompanist on the organ. Shri Ghotankar brought to the studios the same instrument with which he accompanied Bal Gandharva.

(Ghotankar plays the organ)

Ranade: The company was camping in Bombay. Narayanrao once went for a stroll and happened to visit S. Rose's shop. He saw this same organ. A man in the shop played on it on Narayanrao's request. Narayanrao stood behind the organ and asked the man to put down the plank at the back. He came forward... watched carefully... listened to its tone... he was happy and satisfied! 'We must get this organ!' Returning to the residence he talked to his brother - Bapurao - who was also the manager of the company: 'We need one pedal-organ Bapurao. Oh! What a beautiful piece S. Rose has. We need precisely that!' Bapurao said, 'I agree... But we have debts of Mr. Lad to pay off. We require Ladsaheb's permission.' 'Men get it' Narayanrao replied. Bapurao could not make up his mind because the amount of the debt was nearly one and half lakh rupees. He delayed the matter for 8-15 days. Narayanrao asked him again, 'Did you go?' Bapurao replied in the negative. Narayanrao continued, 'I know you won't go! Nobody listens to a debtor!' Bapurao was moved. 'Do not say that, please' he said. 'I will go now'. He put on his coat hastily and went to Ladsaheb. Bapurao was ushered into a hall. Ladsaheb came in and enquired, 'Bapurao, what brings you here?' 'I was coming this way and thought of calling on you'. How would a solicitor be fooled by such lies! Lad said, 'Bapurao, I am sure a person like you will not come to me without a purpose. Tell me about the work you have'. Bapurao then said, 'Narayanrao has seen and liked one pedal-organ. He wishes to buy it'... Ladsaheb asked. 'How many organs do you have in the company?'... 'Two... One is played on Wednesdays outside (in front of the stage), which is played by Dattoba Jangam. The other organ (played by Keshavrao Kamble) is played only on Saturdays and Sundays. Besides these there are other two

organs kept in the wings and two are kept where we stay... That makes a total of six!' Ladsaheb exclaimed: 'So you have six! Well, then you may!... Bapurao thought Lad was not very willing. Narayanrao was eagerly waiting for Bapurao, 'What did Ladsaheb say?' Bapurao narrated what had happened and added 'How can I convince a lawyer why you need that instrument?!' Narayanrao was upset.

Company moved from Bombay and settled in Pune - Kirloskar Theatre. *Manapaman* was performed on the first Sunday, *Ekach Pyala* on the second, *Swayamvar* on the third consecutive Sunday and the fourth Sunday was booked for *Draupadi*. Narayanrao came to the make-up room at about 12-12.30 as per his usual practice. The make-up was on, when suddenly Ladsaheb emerged with four men, carrying the (same) organ! Narayanrao was overwhelmed by joy... This organ enjoys this history!

Ranade: As an instrument what special features does it have?

Ghotankar: Special... in the sense... The organ which was not approved by Narayanrao, had only three lines - with wavelengths of 16 ft., 8 ft. and 4 ft. respectively. It was a bass organ with the bass-line towards the player and the treble towards the singer. This means less tone for the singer. This is why Narayanrao preferred this particular instrument.

Ranade: Nanasaheb, since the instrument (organ) is going out of circulation, very few people know about it. We would like you to give us technical information with the help of this instrument. Please explain about the keyboard to begin with...

Ghotankar: This is the keyboard. This organ consists of five saptak-s...Twelve keys for each saptak, bringing the total number of keys to 60. Plus the first sa repeated gives us 61. The instrument also has 'lines'. This organ has four and three-fourth. It has one more box at the back - which is known as nikharj. (Opens the 'stops' and demonstrates 2, 4, 8 & 16 lines.) It has foot-pedals too. Air is blown in through them. Now I will describe to you the difference between a harmonium and an organ. When we are not playing harmonium, then the bellow is flat. It expands only when we operate the bellow to take the air in. The springs bring in pressure and throw out air through the reeds. But in case of the organ, the air remains in. We remove this air out thus creating a vacuum. This is easy to understand. For example, we whistle in two ways. By blowing out or by suction. A whistle sounds sweet when we use the latter

method. Harmonium gives therefore a more forceful sound, whereas organ sounds sweeter. This is the main difference. Some variation is made in the design in view of the suction. Reeds of the harmonium are fixed below with screws. In organ, reeds are fixed inside the plank. Each reed can be taken out separately for tuning...

Ranade: Please explain the rear side of the structure.

Ghotankar: A box which is seen here is the nikharj - the line lower than even kharj (lower octave). Lowest frequency of a musical note can be 16. This box helps in reaching it. The instrument also has tremolo (effect). Harmoniums also have it. It makes a note shake. (Demonstrates).

The organ also has a mute behind. It has a door too. Sound becomes louder if we open the door and it is suppressed if the door is closed. This portion has two lines on both the sides. (The front portion has two and half lines.) This is an organ of four and three-fourth lines.

Ranade: In Maharashtra, there are numerous lovers of Bal Gandharva's style of singing, his gayaki. Many of the musicians also fall into the category. Narayanrao however does not have disciples of his own. How would you account for this?

Ghotankar: I myself was puzzled by the fact. I asked Bal Gandharva about it. Once, around 1950, Kakasaheb (Gadgil) who was then a minister had invited Bal Gandharva for a felicitation-function. I accompanied Bal Gandharva. He had a backache and I was massaging him. I asked him 'Narayanrao, your music is so much liked... Why have you not trained anybody to continue your tradition?'

Narayanrao answered, 'Nana, there were (and there are) musicians with a sweet, melodious and flexible voice, strong in laya, who are working with me for nearly 20 years. Why have they not picked up anything from me?' In (Bal Gandharva's) centenary celebration programme, Krishnarao (Chonkar) has noted an incident. In one of the *Saubhadra* performances Krishna, Arjun and Subhadra were played by Nevrekar, Chonkar and Narayanrao respectively. Krishna and Arjun sang in a slightly higher pitch, but it was only Subhadra who received most of the 'once-mores'! Narayanrao commented, 'People do not like the singing if you use a higher tone. You need to sing like this. If in 20 years of close acquaintance one is not able to grasp the basic truth then how can possibly others understand?'

Ranade: You have accompanied Bal Gandharva for over a long time. What features of his style can you define as distinctive?

Ghotankar: Playwright writes a play. A music-director thinks and fits certain raga in the place reserved for music in the script. Now the mood created by aroha-avaroha ... and the mood of the play. A sensitive person like Narayanrao is able to sense that mood. He is the one who feels the para-pida (sufferings of others). As a singer-actor, he brings out the mood and reaches the audience. P. L. Deshpande had also mentioned in one of his lectures: Bal Gandharva places aroha-avaroha on a pedestal, bows down to them and then sings! Take raga Mand. Kacha (in *Vidyaharan*) is dead. It is a lamentation. In *Ekach Pyala* again, Sindhu sings, *Manas ka badhirave*. She is going to her parent's house leaving her husband Sudhakar behind. She is apprehensive - something untoward may happen! In the third instance, Krishna comes to Rukmini and tells her 'For me there is nobody but you in this world'. Rukmini becomes very happy and sings - *Naravar Krishnasaman*. This is a joyous mood and prior to it is a serious monologue of twenty minutes... all these in Mand! You see how Narayanrao used to sing *Manas Ka...* in Mand, tivra-madhyam and komal-nishad are not used. But Narayanrao used them selectively - only at certain places - to show the helplessness. (Ghotankar sings).

Ranade: A question about his pronunciations. How would you comment on his pronunciation?

Ghotankar: If he had any guru in speech, it was Deval Master! When he (Bal Gandharva) joined Kirloskar company in 1905, Deval was his talim-master. Deval was a writer and a poet himself. He would explain during the rehearsals where and how to stress words etc. Only then would he proceed with the rehearsals. Bal Gandharva had to bear with Deval's pinches several times - mostly for the pronunciation of the letter 'ksha'! He was given a couplet (karika) of the same letter and was asked to learn it by heart. He was to utter this karika first, before every rehearsal!

Ranade: A question recurs. You talked about Deval-master's talim of the prose. What about his training of words in songs?

Ghotankar: The same method because the colloquial words appear in songs too. Bal Gandharva wasn't a slave of rhythms - it is the other way round.

Ranade: Bal Gandharva has mostly enacted female-roles. Softness is inevitably required in a female role. Has Bal Gandharva ever exaggerated?

Ghotankar: No.

Ranade: Because the way the sentence is uttered 'Dada to aale na' has always been a matter of mockery. Even the pronunciation of word 'Dada' is criticised for being too soft and inaudible.

Ghotankar: Those who raise these objections have not really 'heard' Balgandharv. I have heard him. His pronunciation was very clear.

Ranade: You were mentioning about rhythm. Let us hear more about it...

Ghotankar: Suppose a person is happy or worried in his day-to-day life, how would you recognize it? Through his speech (rhythms)! The same is applied in case of song. Tempo - the laya of a song is selected according to the incident. If this same laya is picked up in a pada (composition) then it sounds 'real'. For example, Sindhu's brother Padmakar asks her why she wanted to stay with the alcoholic husband, when she has a brother (strong and capable) like a mountain. Now, how would she react? Imagine, if you tell me 'Nana you have crossed eighty. Stop playing now, because there is no charm left in your playing'. Then 'how can you say that Ashokrao' would be my reaction! The same tempo should be used when you start with the *pada* - (song) *Kashi ya tyaju padala*. (Plays.)

Ranade: This is a good observation. The tone of the speech is used to begin a song.

Ghotankar: In saying 'How do you say it', if I add 'Ashokrao' at the end of the question, then people would say 'he is adding words of his own'. But you see, it is necessary to add word sometimes to sound more real.

Ranade: In what ways does it become useful to add new words while singing?

Ghotankar: For justifying the meaning, I will give an example. I have seen many Arjuns in *Saubhadra* (performances). In singing *hoto dwarakabhuvani, pahili priya nayani* if he adds: Whose priya (fiancée) I saw? - Then the meaning is clearer. Isn't it?

Ranade: Remember any song where Narayanrao put new words (not originally provided in a song)?

Ghotankar: Sometimes he used to add a few words and sometimes replaced the original words of songs. Narayanrao once told me, 'Nana, Rukmini should say! *'Nath ha maza, mohi mana* instead of *mohi khala*'. Another good example I remember. It has been strongly embossed on my mind. In 1947 we had a performance in Amravati. 'Rhythm (theka) of *Dhav ghali Vithoba* was on. It was around 2 a.m. Bal Gandharva went on *Dhav Vithu dhav ata chalu nako mand, Badve maj mariti aisa kahitari aparadh*. But where were the words dhav, dhav originally in the song? But he uttered them so effectively that people were excited. I literally had tears in my eyes. The whole abhang is as if carved on my memory. Also in the same song *Vithobacha haar...* He used to sing as *Vitho... bacha haar!* This is not an ordinary haar (garland) but God's haar. He knew how and where the emphasis should be given. (Ghotankar sings.) In another place *Shivya deti mhanati mahara dev bativala*. Mahara is a bad word used. Stress used to be given on that word. He used to create an impact on the audience through such techniques.
