

My Fourth Guru

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This year is Prof B. R. Deodhar's Birth Anniversary. He was a disciple of Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar who was the first person to uplift the prestige of music and musicians, brought a refreshing reformist zeal to music - and established music education on modern lines (along with Pt. Bhatkhande).

Deodhar did many things uncommon for a musician working in the early decades of the twentieth century. He left school in 1920 and joined the non-cooperation movement. While learning Hindustani art music, he composed music for films during the years 1921-26, founded a school of music (1925) and graduated in history and economics (1930). On Pt. Paluskar's advice, he began learning Western Art Music as early as 1920.

Deodhar's music school was a great center of attraction. Even the maestros loved to come to his school. Junior performers came to him because Deodhar provided them a platform. Students sought him out because he was a master teacher able to explain as well as demonstrate music, indeed a rare combination. Educated non-musicians made it a practice to visit him because he was keen on promoting music as culture, and not merely as a skill to entertain patrons. Music was closely associated with Indian national identity and persons of the stature of Sarojini Naidu, Annie Beasant, Bipin Chandra Pal and Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya visited his school. Obviously, Deodhar projected an accommodative academism, which did not suffer from a 'bookish' pallor! In the world of Hindustani music, 'unofficial' honorific is often more valued - so was Deodhar's 'professorship'! Ustads and Pandits from all gharana-s and from every region were happy to visit, perform or discuss at his school. Rajab Ali, Allauddin, Ali Akbar, Ravi Shankar, Sindhi Khan, Bundu Khan, Ganpatrao Devaskar, Bade Ghulam Ali and many other maestros performed at his school.

He was an avid collector, discerning analyzer and a patient teacher of bandish. Bandish is the most basic composition valued by musicians. The more authentic bandish a musician knows, the wealthier he is considered to be! Deodhar imbibed bandishes from every musician within his reach. Whenever he went to a new

place he would hunt for old, forgotten but knowledgeable musicians. He coaxed, cajoled and finally persuaded them to part with their musical treasures. Once Deodhar learnt that one Patankarbuwa, who was a music teacher in a Mumbai municipal school knew a beautiful and rare tarana composition in an equally rare raga called Pancham. Deodhar immediately started inviting Patankarbuwa to special functions, began sending small presents to him and even admired his shawl!

Patankarbuwa was also a man of the world! So one day he called Deodhar aside and said, "You are so nice to me, many thanks! But tell me what do you want from me?" Deodhar candidly explained to him his desire to learn the tarana. Patankarbuwa immediately taught Deodhar the composition. Deodhar master, as I came to know him later, used to narrate histories of many compositions before teaching them to me.

Knowing a musician or learning from him was only half of Deodhar's work. After that he would proceed to write on these musicians and place their art in perspective. He would, in other words, document their music. 'Publicize or perish' was fast becoming a new mantra in the forties and without Deodhar's dedicated work we would have lost much of the 'living past' these musicians represented. That would have created an unbridgeable historical chasm. Performing arts suffer more from abrupt breaks and revolutions than we imagine. During this phase, Deodhar taught music to the likes of Pt. Kumar Gandharva, wrote on music and musicians. edited a magazine called Sangeet Kala Vihar for 25 years and became Dean of the prestigious music faculty of the Benaras Hindu University.

At the age of 58, when many would think of retiring, he went abroad to learn voice culture from Prof. Engum. Deodhar was often ridiculed and criticized for his studies in foreign voice-culture. But today it is an established foundational discipline in music and theatre studies. When I went to him to learn voice culture in 1969 he jocularly complimented me for realizing the importance of voice-culture so early in my career -as I was only in my thirties. To my surprise and delight he was open to free and frank discussions. For example. in a party at the earlier premises of Max Muller Bhavan, he once told me, "Do you know the history of this house? This house belonged to Atiya Begum Faizee Rehman who was the prime mover of the scheme passed in Lucknow All India Music Conference to found a University of Music." With a mug of beer in his hand, he looked quizzically at my empty hands. Mischievously he told my wife, "I am going to teach Ashok everything". While she looked puzzled, he handed over a mug to me and effortlessly hummed compositions about wine and drinking!

Once we started talking about the infidel ways of musicians, "Why are musicians' so vulnerable to women and liquor?" I asked. He thought for a while and said, "Actually musicians are not vulnerable, but they sense pretty well who is vulnerable! They are not the hunted, they are the hunters. As for the drink, they drink to forget their own faulty musicianship!"
