

Some prevalent queries about Music

An Interview of Dr Ashok Da Ranade

(Published in Maestros Speak - An open forum on Indian Classical Music,
Edi. Alka Deo-Marulkar, Shobhana Kulkarni-Gado, Gaanwardhan, Pune, January 2015)

[Present article can be interpreted as a discussion with the 'scholar musician'. In this modern and intellectually aware era, music minded people have many queries about music, but there is a little possibility to get their exact answers. However, the correct and new perspectives for the music 'contemplation' can be achieved if these queries are sorted out from authoritative musicians. We are presenting such important queries which have been raised here and are relevant too; besides, we also would experience that Dr. Ashok D. Ranade has clarified these issues with his crystal clear oration and decisive thought process. In this interview, Dr. Shrirang Sangoram has put forth these queries in front of the veteran. Dr. Ranade's views were supported by Dr. Shashikala Shirgopikar, by her live demonstrations, wherever necessary. Dr. Shirgopikar is a popular artiste and has been ex-vice president of Gaanwardhan.]

Q. There have been two aesthetic streams in the Hindustani Classical Music - classicism and romanticism. What do you think about them?

Ashok Ranade: I insist to refer as 'Hindustani Art Music' usually mentioned as 'Hindustani Classical Music' and that is why; the term 'classicism' has been included in your question. However, I do not think that classicism and romanticism are two separate concepts of music. In my opinion, any art form embodies those concepts which are related to its formative structure and its emotional aspect while presenting it to the appreciators. Every art has both of these concepts while their expression is in the process. One of the factors of artistic manifestation depends upon its formative components and while its concept is actuated into practical delineation, the mental status of the performer is taken into consideration. That is why, both these perspectives are inevitably existing, and in my opinion they are appropriate human perspectives. In every span of time, they can be felt simultaneously.

Q. It is probable that the musical presentation is being done in any of the above perspectives but the involvement of the mental framework has to be there. So, how can we then, divide them into water- tight compartments?

Ashok Ranade: Any "ism" cannot be water tight. Whenever any new thought is added to the traditional material it assimilates itself for attaining enriched quality. That is the reason, these romantic "isms" etc. lose their relevance when such "realization" takes place; because, what becomes the ultimate criterion is the "qualitative merit". Usually, we wander into the low lying regions, so we think that these isms are contrary to each other and that results into the preferential selection process of either of this or that ism.

Q. In the present times, Khayal genre is the most prominent expression of Hindustani Music. Though, there have been changes in the style of Khayal according to time and aptitude, yet it is felt that there should not be any place for extremities in dealing with some aesthetic concepts of Khayal. For instance, exaggerated scope given to the Sargam (notation), over sentimentality, negation of the entire form of Bandish (composition) and erecting the whole Khayal on the basis of mere Mukhada (the signature line of the Bandish) and not only this, not giving any importance to 'Bandish oriented Raga' delineation; instead, developing the raga according to the individual's "at will" approach by taking only some few words from the Bandish and avoiding the development of the raga according to the structure of the Bandish! It may be acceptable that there should be no rigid regulation for "performing" a Raga, yet it also cannot be acceptable if the artiste totally roots out the very structure of the Bandish. This results into the confusing state of mind from the view point of the audience. What is your opinion?

Ashok Ranade: If we observe minutely, we cannot call the above mentioned concepts as "aesthetic concepts"; which means, Sargam, sentimentality, or negating the importance of words are only the factors in improvising. Aesthetic values are situated at the higher level. But, let us take your concern for discussion which is - 'the excessive use of Sargam and other extremities do not help to the exposition of Khayal as desired, or let us say, Khayal does not project itself properly, and because Khayal is the most prominent genre of music in the present times, it should not face such a predicament'. If your view goes in this direction, I can agree to this. One most concerning factor is that, people have not yet understood the importance of Bandish in its correct sense. Even the veterans are not exceptions. For instance, the importance of Taal in the Bandish is not yet correctly realized even by the acknowledged artistes! However, this statement may not be true, because they accept the importance of these points, but this awareness is

not properly reflected in their practice and performance. To my opinion, this may have a specific reason - which is - the habit or a repeated activity. If some person has any defect in his leg, he will try to conceal it, and it is not wrong. Similarly, a person gets answer for a question according to his own ability; that is why, if somebody has found out any solution for himself in this context, we cannot blame him. But, whatever loss such a person suffers, others should understand it and as the honest and sincere music students, they should decide what steps they have to take if they wish to avoid such extremities and the loss resulting out of them. Swami Vivekanand has stated "the one, who achieves knowledge, automatically has the responsibility to implement it." So, instead of criticizing other vocalists, one should decide as what should be the direction of his goal. This attitude takes the student towards a different thought, which is, "even if my guru does not do this, why *should not* I do that?" I feel the students should think this way.

Q. During these years, we have been observing that the young music students are inclined towards taking training of Dhrupad (the ancient form of Art Music). Khayal has maintained its ever changing manner but Dhrupad is still not flexible enough to relax its rigidity. What do you think about the prevalent performances of Dhrupad Dhamar in the concerts?

Ashok Ranade: Truly speaking, in the present times, Khayal also is gradually withdrawing itself from the concerts. Because, whatever the style of Khayal is in vogue, it is near to the romantic style of Thumri, which is bound to happen! These various genres regularly change their "attire", and they get enough scope for changing themselves. But, Dhrupad Dhamar has come across the situations, where they are forcibly advocating the does and don'ts which are totally unchangeable. As a result, whatever "attractive" existed in the Dhrupad Dhamar, or any fluency remained in them they has not yet come forward at least till today. Going back towards Dhrupad Dhamar again, may be a part of fashion today; because the thing which is not usually found, people naturally get attracted towards it and this is also a sign of human "liveliness". Rowing against the stream is a human nature and should be accepted by the society. The point to be reviewed is that whatever you learn and imbibe should be correctly communicated to the people and the true success lies there! People are ready to listen to that which is appropriately and honestly projected to them; in short, you must have a magnetic power which pulls the audience the way you wish.

Q. What do you think about the future of Gharanas? The reason for this question is, that, in the present times the young music students do not get proper training of the "traditionally" disciplined (Gharanedar) gayaki. The knowledgeable musicians opine that due to the breaking of walls of Gharanas, the styles have lost their purity and they are diluted by mixing with each other in such a way, that there is a concerning anticipation about the new artistes who may be creating "formless" music hereafter.

Ashok Ranade: The existence of Gharanas is inevitable! Yes, maybe they will not be named by their traditional "labels". Their alignments may differ, but even then they will exist; because Gharana itself means, a well-structured thought process and perspective and such perspectives will exist forever - may be in abundance. I cannot agree with your statement that the young musicians are not receiving "traditionally disciplined" form of singing, but, yes, whatever hard work or efforts are needed to obtain such training, the youngsters are not mentally as well as physically prepared for that! That is the reason, youngsters are tempted to go to the famous artistes - this is the trait I find in the youngsters; because they cannot discriminate between the excellent performers and sincere Gurus! Usually, we observe that the successful performers are not much interested to impart arduous training or not well versed to do so. The old veterans used to say "the best is singing, better is playing an instrument and the last of these is dancing" (Uttam Gana, Madhyam Bajana, Kanishtha Nachana), but they have also said further in this chain (which people do not want to understand) that, "Bikat Batana", that is "teaching and dissemination of the unique and complex knowledge is the most difficult and the noblest task". The word "giving" involves "taking" too, yet, "giving" is very difficult than "taking" and that is why givers are less in number. This is the point where the youngsters get confused! They are incapable of taking decision of their own in the context of training of music, and they are avoiding to strive for this. Easy popularity and fame at hand are the matters which tempt them always. "I am a disciple of this legendary singer and my name is inserted in the long list of his disciples" gives them a sort of secured feeling and they become victims of "group mentality" like a flock of sheep. This gives me feeling that today's youth is less discriminative and less wise than the older musicians. They do not have enough courage to select their Guru meticulously and this is the concerning matter.

It is not very surprising to see the breaking of walls of the Gharanas and subsequent dilution or assortment of the styles because, it is like a law of nature and is bound to happen.

Q. The classification of the Gharanas is being done through a usual method, which is, the melodic and rhythmic parameters. You have your own opinion about this. Still, don't you think that the evaluation of the Gharanas should be done on the purely artistic level, so that the dominance of artistic values of music will be preserved? One more point worth noticing is that, now a days, the concerts offer various artistes of various Gharanas who project themselves quite differently than whatever we have heard from the older generation belonging to those particular Gharanas. Is there any possibility of creation of the all-inclusive Samagra Gayaki in the coming days?

Ashok Ranade: Truly speaking there is no such evaluation on the basis of lesser or more artistic values. When the classification is done on the basis of melodic and rhythmic criterion, there is a definite discriminative concept behind it. As you mentioned about the artistic heights, it is nothing but an ideal state and this maze of ideals is purposefully created. There is definitely confusion in the context of aesthetic analysis and its validity. Why do you, at first place, need any testimonials? You need only to examine the quality of the product. There are set patterns of the parameters and they evaluate quality. If you are not able to reach any decisive point through these parameters, then it can be taken for granted that they are faulty. You will have to change them; otherwise this analysis will be worthless.

Let us now discuss about which are these values - they are innumerable. The process of counting these values started from the ancient Sanskrit poetics, which mentioned only six patterns (Alankar) and since then we went on increasing this number till thousands. There is no end to analysis, which is quite true; as it is the 'nature' of the analysis. It executes the only task of divisions and sub divisions, which lead to minutest level. That is why, behind the execution of all these aesthetic values, there lays a naive idealism. All these ideal values coming together are expected to create perfection like a nonexistent Rama Rajya, the most ideal rule of Lord Rama, which can only be awaited for. If ever this ideal state comes into an existence, everything will go towards non-spicy tastelessness. It is not always possible that the ideal aesthetic values result into "pleasant experience". People usually speak out in an exaggerated manner! As it is always stated that in some or the other way, an artiste is like a maniac or a neurotic and there might be an element of "extreme hideous aversion" in any art product. These statements are also in such a manner as "in every good object or action there is some artistic element". George Bernard Shaw had expressed that "we cannot reside in a paradise, because there is an everlasting insipidness in heaven, so people prefer to live in the hell". Every artifice has some deficiency and that is why it is called a "piece" of art and that is a symbol of liveliness. That is why, I expect there should be no advent of all inclusive,

perfect, "Samagra Gayaki" in the field of music; and I want to say, if it exists it may lead to a flaw in an aesthetic experience.

Q. How far can we implement the Western concept of Voice Culture on the Indian Classical Music?

Ashok Ranade: Firstly let me make it clear that the method of voice culture propounded by Prof. B.R. Deodhar is not 'Western'; secondly, Prof. Deodhar's method, which I learned from him, has been improvised by me in my own way. The method of voice culture I am disseminating has originated in India and because it is Indian, it has successfully implemented here. My method is not derived from any book; all these concepts already existed in our traditional practices. Each music culture has its own parameters for approving any voice as capable, melodic and eligible for music making; and I have framed this method on our own Hindustani parameters. Besides, we have to take other factors into consideration such as; vocal practices may differ in various music cultures of the world according to physiological differences or body structures, food habits, etc. As dress code in a society reflects specific social norms, in the same way voice culture also reflects the musical values in the particular music culture. So there is no such discrimination like the Western or the Eastern.

Q. Please explain us in detail, the valid contribution of Yoga and good habits in the field of music - this is quite an important point because not only the older people but also the new members of this music camp do believe that chewing a Paan, tobacco or other intoxicating drinks help to open up the voice!

Ashok Ranade: It is not possible, that such convictions cause any blunders, but they do not have any logic behind them. Your question itself resounds that these habits are statutory and do not have any relevance in the direction of "opening up" the voice. When we talk about the breathing exercises for improving voice, we automatically are experiencing Yoga; and let us understand that every posture in Yoga is not supportive for voice production. I only recommend those methods of Yoga which are directly related with voice production. Truly speaking, Yoga experts may not be knowledgeable in the field of voice culture because Yoga has an absolutely different orientation. In the entire discipline of Yoga, the "Anaahat Naad" (sound which is devoid of any material cause like striking of two objects, which in a way means - the sound pervading the cosmic vacuum and cannot be heard by the naked ears) is given prominence, which is

not relevant to the musicians because this art exists on sound production. That is the reason; Yoga entirely cannot be implemented for vocal exercises.

Paan (betel leaf) and tobacco should also not be discarded totally. Let us think, why did these two things get importance? There has to be some basis behind this! The saliva oozes out when one chews or tobacco, and it may be helpful for the voice lubrication. This saliva wets the throat as well as gives a kick or boost for singing. What I feel that while struggling for success in the perseverance of music, one may be in the need of some extra inspiration which probably will not equally be helpful. What is most important is that an artiste must have a positive mind which keeps him cheerful and inspires him to perform and for this endeavor any harmless habit can be worth accepting. One should also keep in mind that Paan or tobacco are just triggering factors and one needs not to be enslaved by so. I advise every artiste that he should not imitate anybody, just blindly, only because he wants to be as successful as his idol is.

Q. Nowadays, in the concerts, the demand for Ghazal singing is increasing. How much is it proper to impose Classical Music to the style of Ghazal singing? For instance, use of Sargam (notation), slow Alaps, fast tremours and rhythmic play etc. are such concepts which are being used in Ghazal profusely. What do you have to say on this?

Ashok Ranade: Any musical form is ought to change its manner of presentation; consequently, Ghazal singing also is undergoing changes. So, we need not to unnecessarily worry about the rationality of these changes. Ghazal is now desiring to acquire a new shape, however it cannot be confirmed whether this new form will be lasting or not; because, the process of transformation is still continuing. Instead of making hasty comments, let us try to know what could be the reason for this change. Actually, there has been lot of written material on Ghazal as a literary form, but any musical analysis on Ghazal is rarely found. It can be definitely stated that Ghazal was sung properly during the period of Amir Khusro. What Amir Khusro did in this area is, that he restructured Ghazal into a form of lyric; after that, Ghazal was included in the Mushayaras (conference of the poets), where it was merely "read". But when again it switched over to singing, the hangover of recitation of Ghazal did not fade from the minds of the singers. That is the reason; they continued to sing Ghazal with the "tunes" for the mass appeal, though it was associated tightly with rhythm and metre. In the coming years, the Classical singers started elaborating it with Alaaps, so that they get enough freedom from the set form of the style. This was the next phase of the Ghazal, which brought forward the background music and interlude music pieces through

orchestration and thus Ghazal again took shape of a song. This is the present scenario and I strongly feel that Ghazal will progress forward as it has survived itself in spite of many transformations.

Q. The criteria of literary aesthetics and poetics are not to be implemented on the Art Music in a considerably specific manner. In this perspective, one has to analyse lyric-dominated genres and melody-dominated forms in a different way. The question is, whether the criteria of the aesthetics are distinct for appreciating Khayal from any other aesthetic criteria? Besides, some veteran musicians think that all the parameters of the process of "Rasa" (emotive flow) such as, Bhaav-Vibhaav, Anubhaav and Sanchari Bhav, etc. which is propounded in Bharata's *Natyashastra* can be entirely implemented on music also. We expect your expert comments in this regard.

Ashok Ranade: This matter has been elaborated in detail quite frequently at various points, but it needs a layer by layer analysis. The criteria which are exclusively related to music will be inevitably implemented only on music. That is why if two separate branches of study such as literary aesthetics and poetics are intruding the field of performing arts, it is a mistake on both the sides - at one end are these two branches as well on the other, we ourselves; because music is not a subject belonging to them. That is why; the creating exclusive, parallel plan of an aesthetic analysis for music is felt mandatory. Any music related query must be sorted out on the thought process in this newly created Aesthetics of Music. I would like to request the musicians, thinkers and performers to help themselves in finding solutions to those musical problems in their own capacity if they cannot find answers properly in this newly created aesthetics of music, instead of borrowing parameters from other branches of study.

Q. Can the poetically oriented "Rasa" (emotional states) be compared with or implemented to the Rasas which come through music?

Ashok Ranade: Comparison of one thing to the other is quite easy. Your question will be valid if this comparison is done through one channel. It seems that the performing arts make one "unit", when they are put together, and music, dance and drama are most relevant parts of this unit; so, all the common queries regarding all the performing arts will be equally applied to these main art forms also. However, the queries related to music may not be valid for drama or dance and so on and so forth. In this manner, these questions will be distributed. Consequently, the "Rasa- process" which is related to drama will not be possible to get connected with music; but if you feel that it is a

concept which can be found relevant to music too, you can think about its application. In fact, Bharata's entire aesthetic science is very important and he has gone quite in depth while he analyzed experimental and performing art also. But, as we have been thinking and adhering to this single concept, the extreme reaction has a reason that, the Rasa-process cannot be applied on music from any angle - which is not surprising. So we have to reframe our convictions and must explore the phonetics of poetry and take out whatever is valid for music etc.

Q. The personality of a music perceiver (sincere student) of new generation should be framed by keeping in view the interdisciplinary aspects of knowledge and one should be capable of appreciating other parallel fine arts as well as his aptitude for reading good literature should also get improved - if this pre-notion about these young performers takes a serious turn, will it not deviate them from pursuing their music single mindedly with devotedness? However, it is also usually observed that these youngsters are not much enthusiastic about obtaining knowledge from various avenues which may add to enriching their personality.

Ashok Ranade: As you expect, the ideal image of a musician should be doubtlessly according to whatever has been said so far in this direction; and in fact our traditional pattern of music training had unconditionally included "interdisciplinary" perspectives to enrich the student's subject of perseverance. Ironically enough, this notion is missing today. Our age old method of training gave equal importance to the allied subjects which support the main subject; for instance, how to maintain and preserve the instruments and above all the training of repairing of the instruments was also included. Now, without a deliberate initiation for the above mentioned "accessories", the student will not progress in his main field. According to you, such a varied exploration may direct the attention and the concentration of the student; here I want to clarify that such a multi-channeled study needs discriminative vision and the student will have to select and imbibe whatever is relevant and beneficial, just like a tree which receives everything but absorbs only that which is essential for its nourishment and also similarly, our body enthuses energy as a "living" organism and alertly receives and imbibes whatever is useful for its nourishment. But, what matters to me, is the 'honesty' one must have while pursuing such exploration. As I mentioned before, while the youngsters do not enjoy their decision making power, they also may go for these allied sectors of knowledge only as a fashion so as to boast that they have some 'say' on these subjects. It is a way of one's "intense" training to just 'feel' the aesthetic vibration of other arts without really "knowing" them. Such "sensitive impressions" may help him

though, unknowingly to enrich his musical entity; but he must avoid commenting, with vanity, on these subjects without really understanding them.

Q. The present predicament in the field of music is that the students of music have to undergo academic education in the colleges and universities, which eventually takes them to undertake a job for their survival due to which music remains in their life more as a hobby and not a full fledged profession. Do you think this situation can affect the standard of music in the coming period? The most concerning matter is, that the young music students are getting enough opportunities of expressing their views with freedom and exactness, getting support from the media, yet there is a mere possibility for creating the serious and dedicated music students who can devote their entire life to music. What is your outlook regarding this socio-musical background?

Ashok Ranade: First of all, the most important factor is that we can take advantage of the media which comes under the learning process, and the biggest problem is that we do not even know the utility of those media; we just look at them blankly and do not use them! The funniest part of it is that we are not using the media, but on the contrary, these media are making use of us! We have become addict to them in the most foolish manner. We are drifting along the water current! What is most essential is the self initiated action! Now the youngsters do not have to undergo physical hard work which the older generation had to do at their Guru's homes, instead, youngsters receive attractive amount of scholarships, fellowships or stipends and other means of facilities, which the previous generation did not enjoy. In this most congenial situation, the students must also be aware that their responsibilities have also increased accordingly, that is why self-decision is the only thing which can take them to the path of progress and success.

Q. Music criticism is still a neglected path of Hindustani music and the newspaper reporting has now become a matter of disregard. At least today, only a newspaper reporting is available in the name of criticism to the performers and appreciators. What do you think about journalism which executes a mere reporting the music events?

Ashok Ranade: This is a quite relevant and important question. I have been repeatedly stating that evaluation, criticism, aesthetic analysis, artistic examination and its philosophical explanation are the various specifically created standards with reference to which we can look at the musical presentation. One needs an exclusive capability to

examine a "musical piece of art" on its standards mentioned above. As long as we do not get such authority, we cannot expect a proper evaluation and an opinion propounded about a performance. Unfortunately, those who execute the task of music appreciation, through these Medias, do not have even a minimum expected knowledge about this art, so, the activity of music appreciation is only reduced to mere 'demand and supply'. That is why; whatever is easily available is kept forward. The newspaper owners or editors are also indifferent to this situation and because the political issues are most important to them, they rarely pay heed to maintain the level of music appreciation which they include in their journals just as a formality. They are not even aware of their ignorance in this subject and that causes a chaotic situation.

Another incorrect assumption of these editors, is that they only go through the paper qualifications of the columnist along with his degrees in music and mistake him as an authority to evaluate music. The justifiable point in this assumption is that the editors have shown their confidence in the person but the columnist must prove his merit and confirm the faith the editor has put on him, but this does not happen. As soon as the writer gets the position to write as a critic, he forgets his responsibility. Neither he maintains the same fervor to self analyse his merit, nor tries to go deep in his endeavor. That is why, if we blame an editor, equally the blame goes to the writer himself. The crux of the matter to be considered is, whether you have enough knowledge of the subject you are talking or writing about, or you are continuously conscious to increase and update your knowledge! This reflects their lack of perseverance and that is why, we have to think seriously about this. The circumstances regarding performing arts are quite pathetic today, which we have to accept. We have lot of 'educated' musicians today, and that calls for the responsibility on the part of these 'literate performers' to surrender themselves to the subject cautiously and meticulously.

Q. Is it essential that a critic must be a performing artiste in its truest sense?

Ashok Ranade: My individual and strong opinion, which I have been putting forth since the last 25 years and which seems appropriate to me is that, as a person studies performing arts sincerely and as he experiences and knows the related matters, the same cannot be experienced by any other individual who is only like a witness to the performing arts. It happens only because the nature of performing arts cannot be understood thoroughly without experiencing the practice of performing the art! For instance, one cannot understand the moves in the game of wrestling only by observation. The psycho-physical actions involve equal perception of body and mind and unless this assimilation is done, the person cannot experience the realization of the

secrets hiding in these arts. Thus, an individual who has not undergone the activity of singing or has not even handled any musical instrument will not clearly understand the inherent features of the Raga. The form which belongs to the kinetic sensitivities is psycho-physical. It is the individual himself who will have to experience the kinetic sensitivities; nobody else can experience them on his behalf. May be, an unsuccessful or not so competent singer can become an excellent music critic, but he will definitely have to undergo the process of performing music. However, if one does not feel it necessary; consequently it leads to a mere "bookish" music appreciation and the person continues to use his pen with an assumption that he is an "authority on words" which is his so-called qualification! This is unfortunate!

Q. In connection with 'music criticism' or an overall 'art criticism', we have been listening to the exposition of your valuable thoughts, from time to time! Relevant with this reference, I want to ask, what should be the direction towards which the music criticism, belonging to the spheres other than the newspapers, is expected to proceed and how far this task is possible to be executed through the efforts of musicians and performers?

Ashok Ranade: The various factors and levels in this subject embody one more prominent aspect which is called evaluation. This medium is used to examine a piece of art quite objectively (restricted only to the territory of present performance). The art criticism is complete when it is done on the basis of the structure of that art product, its form and its output, when such evaluation is done more extensively on the criteria of larger aesthetic concepts, it is called 'analytical criticism'. When we go forward towards more abstract elements and their experience, we reach its philosophical and intense aesthetic region. Thus, it is essential to visualize and analyse the artifice on all these four factors, and we can expect such criticism from him who has a required research faculty and has a competence to express it. I do feel that the work can be executed by the students of these performing arts. The legendary veterans like Sharangdev and Bharatmuni were the excellent performers themselves, which is why they could project themselves as excellent and competent theoreticians or musicologists. Yes, it is only possible for the performers, but mind it, this path is thorny and one has to have enough tolerance and courage to face them. We must become brave and valorous by our own effort, which is very difficult indeed; but it is the earnest 'call' of time and we have to come forward without any fear!
