

Review of “Living Music: Conversations with Pandit Dinkar Kaikini”

Navshakti

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In connection with this column, "Raga Ranga," several classical music lovers have contacted me last month. These interested readers have sincerely applauded this column, our selection of artists, their previously unexpressed thoughts, and some previously untold facts about their lives. Each passing week has brought in increasing numbers of letters, phone calls, e-mail messages, and Facebook postings. Among these regular readers is one Mr. Umesh Bhogle. Mr. Bhogle, whose love for music is boundless, reads this column and telephones me every week. Last week, he sent me a book. In his opinion, this is a book that every lover of classical music "must" have in his or her collection. With great curiosity, I started to read the book. And in a few moments, I was completely carried off by the stream of wholesome ideas and experiences that were latent in the covers of that book. It was only after finishing the last page that I found my feet and came to my senses again. This book is a musical conversation between a greatly talented and experienced Guru and his sincere and honest disciple. It is also a journal of the disciple's initiation into musical ideas. In this book, the disciple has virtually distilled the essence of her Guru's musical life in masterly style, after carefully understanding the views of her Guru, accumulated through a lifetime of reflection and experience, supplemented by the richness of his life as an artist, composer and teacher. Through her pen, readers will get a view of her Guru, and his thoughts on music. The author conducts the reader to her own discovery of the musical universe, attained through conversations with her Guru; she does it with an admirable modesty, befitting a sincere disciple. The book is titled "Living Music: Conversations with Pandit Dinkar Kaikini", by Priya Purushothaman. It bids fair to be called a book that nourishes the idea of the Guru-Shishya Parampara, on the one hand and stands as a model of the best Gurudakshina that a Guru could get from a disciple.

Priya Purushothaman is an artist who presently lives in Bengaluru. She graduated from Columbia University in New York with a degree in Economics, Philosophy and Creative Writing, and has studied Western Music as well as Karnatak Music while she was growing up. In 2003, she started studying Hindustani classical music from Smt. Aditi Kaikini Upadhya, who is Pt. Dinkar Kaikini's daughter. Later she also received guidance from Pt. Dinkar Kaikini. One day, after she had been studying Karnatak Classical Music for 10 years in New York, she happened to listen to a piece of North Indian Classical music. Priya feels that after that moment, her fate took over, and brought her straight to Pt. Dinkar Kaikini, the great Guru of Hindustani Classical Music, and his "Anand Ashram" – abode of joy. So thoroughly was she captivated by Hindustani Classical Music! However, she confesses in all humility that, she had no idea at that time how much arduous effort is needed to learn this Music. It was when she started learning from Pt. Kaikini that she realized that this requires not merely great effort, but something more – it needs the equivalent of the tapascharyaa of the ancient sages. She says that the study of classical music requires a sharp mental capacity

coupled with an equal physical preparedness. One has to cultivate a highly disciplined life-style in which several strict regimens must be observed. It is essential to preserve a respectful relationship with the Guru, bearing in mind the maxim "□□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ - where else will I get knowledge, if not from my guru?" The paths leading to the magic of classical music are strewn with the delicately knotty threads of this complex relationship. To understand the magic, one has to have total trust in the Guru. In turn, a capacity for introspection is essential for developing such trust. In order to attain the purity of classical music, and to realize its possibilities, one must, above all else, be an honest and unselfish human being. Only a person who has these qualities, and who is prepared to follow the regimens needed for disciplined study can become an excellent disciple. It is because of such universality of feelings that Priya is successful in presenting a portrait of her Guru's musical life, through his conversations with her. Connoisseurs know of Pt. Dinkar Kaikini as a prime disciple of Pt. V. N. Bhatkhande, and as an excellent vocalist of the Agra gharana. But his genius carried him much farther than the usual norms of excellent presentation, and his talents as an excellent composer, a philosopher of music and a senior teacher and guide, allowed him to plant his standard on the highest peaks of achievement. Priya's book is written with the intent of making the richness of thought of this great artist accessible to the general public, taking it beyond the small circle of his friends and disciples.

In reading this book, one realizes that three things stand out as very important in Pt. Dinkar Kaikini's thoughts on music: An aesthetic point of view, capacity of keen observation, and logical thinking. His philosophy is based on an ability to remain dispassionate and logical while closely observing the manifold facets of life and society, and using them to sustain the aesthetic qualities of one's music. He was faithful to these principles throughout his life. He pursued his musical quest with these principles, and used them in training his many disciples.

In the first part of the book, there is a detailed treatment of svara, tala and laya, in vocal and instrumental music, and important conclusions are drawn from this discussion: That human feelings are above all adjoined to one's inner being, that good music first touches our core, and only then appeals to our intellect, and that music is not for diverting the mind, but for engaging our inner core. If one wants to bring joy to other through one's music, one must first merge into one's inner core – the atman.

In the third part of the book subtitled "Vidya Daan", there is a treatment and analysis of the knowledge that Panditji has conveyed to his disciples. Here Panditji's remarks are copiously reported.

This book, published by Popular Prakashan is not just a book; it is a joyous journey, a replete experience. It is only through understanding the philosophical basis of anaahata naad (sound produced without striking) and ahata naad (sound produced by striking) in classical music that one can fully experience this joyous journey. Anaahata naad (sound produced without striking) is the primal sound, beyond the reach of our sense of hearing. It is the sound of Om that the sages of Vedic times realized through rigorous penance. It is through their efforts that we are able to experience at least the vibrations of sound

today. We get a taste of such supernatural vibrations when we are being carried by the stream of Pt. Dinkar Kaikini's thoughts, which are born out of the universe of his experiences and his musical quest, equivalent to tapascharyaa – the penance of the sages. And if we adopt his ways of thinking, perhaps we might get a faint glimpse of the-path that leads to the road towards that primordial sound.