

Indian Classical Music at Yale-NUS College

Traditional and the individual talent in the classical vocal music of North India

Interview Transcript 4: Uday Bhawalkar

Interviewed by Ravindra Parchure, in Hindi, at Sudharshan Hall, Pune, (March 18, 2019)

Ravindra: Namaskar (greetings), Udayji. On behalf of Yale-NUS College, welcome to our project.

Bhawalkar: Thanks.

Ravindra: Pratapji, welcome to you too.

Pratap: Thanks.

Ravindra: We often get to see that audiences listening to music do not understand much of what happens in the music. It is our aim to help enhance appreciation of music through this project.

Bhawalkar: Very good.

Ravindra: How did you first turn to music?

[Schooling in music]

Bhawalkar: It so happened that my parents, my elder sister ... in fact, all three of us siblings, and I am the youngest ... and my eldest sister was learning singing, in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, in Madhav Sangeet Vidyalay (Madhav Music School), which taught vocal music along the lines of the Gwalior gharana. And from about the age of 7 or 8, I heard her practicing singing at home. From early on I started playing various instruments like the tanpura & the harmonium and I also started singing a bit, and the more I sang, the more my appetite for music grew. And at age 9, in 1975, I joined Madhav Sangeet Vidyalay. For 6 years, I studied there, from 1975 to 1981. That is how I started on my musical journey. In that school, in addition to guidance from my sister, I learnt from three gurus (teachers). In particular, I learnt a lot from Pandit Pramod Shastri, a faculty member there, whom you know too.

Ravindra: After that, how did you turn towards Dhrupad singing?

Bhawalkar: It so happened, that while I was studying at that school, where primarily *khyal* singing was taught, which I learnt amidst whatever opportunities that were available there, at a relatively young age. And for exams at that school, everyone had to sing a few *dhrupad* and *dhamar* compositions, whereas, nowadays, as I find when I ask around, things may be different; but there, the external examiners would ask if we knew a bit of *dhrupad* because without some basic knowledge of various forms, one's education was not treated as complete. So much so that I also received training in *tappa* and *thumri*, though I must admit that what I learnt of those forms was only by way of examples. Mainly I learnt *khyal*, and a little bit of *dhrupad* and *dhamar*. And though I was very young, I used to practice various forms, whether *sargams* or *lakshan geet* or *tarana*, *khyal* and *dhrupad*, and even Marathi *abhangs*, film songs, old songs, etc ... all with equal interest, because my age was such that I had no means of judging what to sing and what not to sing, and all that mattered was that I should sing.

[Learning *dhrupad*]

One day, by chance, I saw an advertisement in a newspaper called *Nayi Duniya* (New World), a major newspaper in Madhya Pradesh (in Ujjain, Bhopal, etc.). In that I saw an advertisement. It said that the government was opening a school for dhrupad in Bhopal, inviting applications from anyone interested in learning dhrupad and becoming a *Dhrupadiya*. I had no idea what it meant to become a *Dhrupadiya* (a singer of *dhrupad*). I asked my mother and father whether I should apply in response to the ad, and they said, "Go ahead and apply, and also ask your teacher." Mr. Shashtri said, "Do apply." He also added that the Dagar family are great musicians and come from a long and esteemed tradition, and I would get a chance to learn well. But there was also that in his tone which assumed that I might learn *dhrupad* for 4 years, and then come back to continue learning *khyal*. This was a reasonable assumption, because very few people studied dhrupad in those days, and indeed, there were many even later who opposed the idea, asking, why would I want to learn this form at all. They said this tradition is finished. It has no rasa, no freedom. In this form you can't do this, can't do that. It is a closed and rigid form. In all these ways people tried to deter me. "Think again," people said. However, I had already begun my dhrupad studies. And when I went to my new guru, without any preconceptions or fixed ideas, with an open mind, ready to learn whatever singing I could pick up, without any plans or anxieties about the future, with nothing but the desire to learn singing, then when I went to my guru, I felt very good.

[The training]

He used to start with us at 4 a.m. First the tanpura would be tuned. That used to feel very good. For an hour at a time we used to practice our *Sa* and our *Pancham*. Then the lower Gandhar. He used to teach us various beautiful *paltas* (vocal turns and phrases). Then he would teach us a *bandish* or two, and depending on his mood, teach us the notes of a *raga* or two. In this way the *dhrupad taleem* (training) began.

Ravindra: Wherever one is now, one's gurus have a great role to play in all that we achieve. Who were the gurus whose blessings you have enjoyed?

[His gurus and their lineage]

Bhawalkar: I have had two gurus. They were brothers: Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar, and Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar. There have been eight Dagar brothers and cousins, vocalists and instrumentalists in our time. The eldest pair was Ustad Nasir Moinuddin Dagar and Ustad Nasir Aminuddin Dagar. After that there was Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Dagar sahib. Then my two gurus, and then Ustad Nasir Zahiruddin Dagar and Ustad Nasir Faiyazuddin Dagar; and Ustad Sayeeduddin Dagar. These were the eight brothers and cousins. I went to study with Ustad Fariduddin & Ustad Mohiuddin Dagar in Bhopal, from 1981 to 1985, for four years, you could say that 70% of all my initial *taleem* (training) was done under *Chhote Ustad* (Fariduddin Dagar), and 30% of my *taleem* was done under *Bade Ustad* (Mohiuddin Dagar). We speak of *Chhote* and *Bade Ustad* because one was the younger and the other the elder brother, but when studying with them, they were both simply "ustad" to us, and *Bade* and *Chhote* were just terms to distinguish between reference to the two brothers. Ustad Mohiuddin would visit Bhopal from Mumbai three to five times a year, sometimes more, even eight times. He would stay 4 or 8 or 10 days at a time. So, I learnt a little from him, but the majority with *Chhote Ustad*, who was a vocalist, while Ustad Mohiuddin Dagar played the rudra veena.

[Mumbai]

He could sing well too. Hence, I got *taleem* (training) from him as well. After four years, I felt that my *taleem* was still incomplete, and I wanted to have more training from *Bade Ustad* in Mumbai. I remember how in the very beginning he gave me an *alap* to learn, and at that very moment I felt I had to learn more from him later.

Ravindra: Yes, it is a thread of continuity, and we all experience its pull ...

Bawalkar: In 1986 I came to Mumbai, and kept learning...

Ravindra: You said that you first started with *khyal*, and later you felt the attraction of *dhrupad*, and found fulfilment in *dhrupad*, dedicated yourself to *dhrupad*.

Bhawalkar: Yes.

Ravindra: What are the differences as you see them between *dhrupad* and *khyal gayaki* (singing styles)?

Bhawalkar: This is a matter of great significance and interest. Let me address this topic in a broad and expansive way. The first thing I want to clarify is that I should not be seen as a spokesperson for all of *dhrupad* singing. Just one person cannot represent all of *khyal* singing. Different people have held various opinions about *dhrupad*. That which I learned from my gurus, which I have thought over ... and that is the basis for what I will share with you.

[The origins of *dhrupad*]

I believe that when *raga*-music came into being as is generally agreed, *dhrupad* was the first to develop. And though it is difficult to be certain about this, even before *dhrupad*, music in Indian culture was always based on melody. Various learned people, including poets and scholars, believe that *Naad* (sound, vibration, music) preceded words, language. The *alap* in a *dhrupad* and the prevalence of *mantra* (prayers, chants) in the ancient past are related. The syllabic utterances we use in *alap* (aa, re, na, ri, na) ... (nom, te ta ra na, etc) all derive from a Sanskrit *mantra* "Om Anant Hari Narayan." My intention in saying this is that the ethos that prevailed in the ancient past, and the tradition that stems from as far back as Swami Haridas (16th c.) goes even further back, to claim derivation from the god Shiva, specifically in the importance of the utterance of "Om" in our tradition. Shiva has been treated as the primordial ancestor of our music. This claim has been made by many, through the ages, and I accept it. Five thousand years from now, people might doubt if Gandhi ever existed. Likewise, some may doubt, if Shiva and Rama ever existed, but many, through the ages, have accepted them as divine incarnations. It is my belief that the tradition has such an origin. And this tradition has had a clear focus on two elements: *bhakti* (devotion), and *gyan* (knowledge). The two are facets of one and the same thing. And they point towards infinity: whatever one does can feel as little.

Ravindra: True.

Bhawalkar: And in that non-completion resides its strength, its true meaning. The day we feel we have it all in hand, that day will be the end of our art. It is in that perspective or context that in the formation of *ragas*. How a *raga* is to be performed, how notes are to be sung, how deep to go into the notes – I might explain this best through an example: when my *Ustad* used to teach a *raga*, say Bhoop or Bhairav or Yaman, if I chanced to touch a fourth note within say 5 minutes, he would ask, "why such haste in moving forward? No need to move beyond two notes yet." The point: what can I manage to explore and develop within two notes? What perspective can I bring to those two notes?

This in itself is matter of deep study and reflection. There is great task to be accomplished in that undertaking. There is no end to the depth to which *svara* (notes) can reach. What can end is our effort, our thinking, and our voices, but the potential inherent to the notes in music is endless. However much we sing, the notes in music always offer something new. Music is inexhaustible. One can always approach it with new thoughts. If one thinks, “Oh I know this,” then nothing can grow. However, if I am able to always present the notes in a new way, if I am able to surrender to them each time I sing, then I will continually discover new colors in them. Given the topic, I might say that our *svara* (music) is great and rich. It is not confined to any one shape, color, or *rasa* (aesthetic emotion). Some have tried to correlate notes to specific *rasas* (aesthetic emotions). But that has not received general acceptance. Each note is capable of evoking all the *rasas* (aesthetic emotions). What is possible depends on the strength of one’s thinking, imagination, and study. *Svara* (the notes of music) cannot ever be confined. Each can be creative in their own way. Therefore, when *dhrupad* and *raga*-music came about, the formation of *ragas*, the study of notes, the development of *alap* ... all this became part of a large process. Words, language came into it later. It is difficult to say how exactly all this came about. *Rishi-munis* (sages and scholars) had a great role to play in this.

[Art music and folk music]

Some say that our *raga*-music grew out of folk music. And I will concede that some of our *ragas* derive from folk music. I accept that all created things are derived from natural things. But sages, scholars and musicians have worked long and hard (to refine art music from folk music). Folk music is part of spontaneous communal life, but *raga*-music is not like that. It needs study. It needs *taleem* (rigorous practice), which sages and scholars established through many centuries as a tradition and discipline.

Ravindra: Regarding the instruments that are used in *dhrupad* performances, the *pakhawaj* (accompanying drum) is central. Can the *tabla* (modern descendant of the *pakhawaj*) be used in *dhrupad*? You have done that?

[Instrumental accompaniment: The *pakhawaj*]

Bhawalkar: Yes, that is indeed possible. But people do ask, why is *tabla* not used generally in *dhrupad*? There is a simple answer. At the time when *dhrupad* developed, during the time when *dhrupad* got established, at that point in time, the *tabla* simply did not exist in our country. The only accompanists’ instrument was the *pakhawaj*. Many *mantras* (chants), including those about *Ganapati*, allude to it. Each instrument has its own temperament and capability. Likewise, each *gayaki* (performance style) has its own nature, and that is shaped in part by the accompanying instrument. The *talas* (rhythmic patterns) of *dhrupad* are those that are suited to the nature of the *pakhawaj*. But the *tabla* is such a versatile instrument that it can accompany everything from *dhrupad* to *ghazal*. Not that *dhrupad* is up there, and *ghazal* is down below; simply that the *tabla* can accompany every form including *bhajans*, provided the *tabla*-player has the capability and knowledge required for the given form of music. So indeed, I have had *tabla* accompanists, and sometimes even the *tabla*-player has played the *pakhawaj*.

Ravindra: That brings me to the topic of how, in *dhrupad* (unlike *khyal*) neither *sarangi* nor *harmonium* are used as accompanying instruments. Is there a specific reason for not using either? The same reason provides the answer. When *dhrupad* developed, the *harmonium* did not exist. After that, the *sarangi* was indeed used by some people. It has been used by some in *dhrupad*, and others have used the *harmonium* in *dhrupad*, as dictated by convenience, or preferred due to their *taleem* (practice). But the singing I have learned has a close affinity with the *veena*, the *rudra veena*

(central to *dhrupad* performed on an instrument). Therefore, our singing does not go close to the sarangi. And we need no stringed accompaniment beyond the tanpura (drone).

Ravindra: Have you sung with sarangi accompaniment?

Bhawalkar: Yes, indeed. Two or three times, with sarangi.

Ravindra: I see, good.

Bhawalkar: (demonstrates *jhala*): This is an aspect close to veena performance. (Gestures to the lateral oscillation performed by veena-players) ... Not sure how well this is liked, but ... (demonstrates) ... this can be played on a sarangi. Some features transpose alright from voice to instrument; some don't. In the end, which instrument to use as accompaniment is a matter of choice. If you prefer a particular type of accompaniment, then it is fine to use that. My kind of *dhrupad* is based on tanpura and veena.

Ravindra: That brings me to my next question ... What is the importance of the tanpura (drone) in *dhrupad*? What is the basis on which you use a tanpura as accompaniment?

[Instrumental accompaniment: the tanpura]

Bhawalkar: I think that our *raga*-music and the tanpura go together. They are joined together. They cannot be separated. Until the introduction of the harmonium into our country, there was only the tanpura (drone). The tanpura has a very important role ... and there are certain things that are not done in an hour or two ... they need experience. For example, in singing Bageshri, Ma will be tuned in a specific way. Its *jawari* (acoustic aspect of a tone) will be handled in a particular way. This will be done differently if the *raga* to be sung is Malkauns. The notes Pa and Ni are also tuned according to the *raga* being sung. We tune the tanpura to accommodate such considerations, and these are complex and minute adjustments, which cannot be tackled on stage, in an auditorium with its lighting and air-conditioning. They need a quiet, isolated room, without noise or distractions. And a good tanpura is required, and someone who understands its tuning. And listeners too are needed who are just as discerning! Then what is desired can be accomplished.

Ravindra: A tanpura is indeed a most vital instrument. When you tune a tanpura, what underlying considerations, such as its harmonic dimension, and the matter of *naad* (sound as vibration, resonance) ... How do you set that up? What training or *taleem* (practice) is involved for you in that respect?

Bhawalkar: I don't think, Ravindraji, that any specific training was involved. But as I said previously, there are minute considerations involved. Let me say first that you've asked a very pertinent question, and though it might seem an exaggeration to some people, it is a truth – and has happened with me, as with others, that as one plays the tanpura, the inspiration to sing some specific *raga* arises from the very act of playing the tanpura. Of course, ordinarily one checks its tuning, as for Pa and Sa, but as one keeps on playing the tanpura, say for 10 minutes or so, some *raga* might suggest itself spontaneously. When one's mind and the tanpura become as one, then the inspiration arises from within it. It feels as if the tanpura is speaking, if one's mind is susceptible and open to its suggestiveness ... and one's energy and mind are immersed in its sound ... then the tanpura is very agreeable to working with you. Such a situation can prevail. And I can add one more thing: sometimes it used to happen, while the tanpura was being tuned, my *Ustad* (guru) would ask, "Which *raga* does the Re note evoke for you?" "Of which *raga* does the Ga note sound like?" And when I offered a guess, he would say, "OK, sing that *raga* then..." When that would not work out, he would point out what was going wrong. The study of such minute details, as when you establish the

note Sa changes on the *jawari* (in the flow), but it does not become Ni, nor even a *shruti* (micro-tone) near it. When one moves one's fingers upward on the drone, the Sa changes but not so much as to become Ni. Nor does it get close to Ni by even a microtone. How then shall we establish Sa firmly on the tanpura? Sa cannot be treated as fixed. It is changeable. Pa too has to be treated as changeable. This is understood by all. Everyone who sings or plays an instrument understands this. If one pushes the skin of the tabla-head even slightly, the note changes. And these kinds of minutiae are true ... Those with a keen ear and good training understand this.

Ravindra: Now I will ask you a few questions regarding the *ragas* you sang today: *Ragas* Jaunpuri, Malkauns, and Marwa. How do you see the *ragas*? Traditionally, *ragas* correlate to specific times (of the day and night), and they are sung according to these time considerations. Your views and experience regarding this?

[The traditional correlation between a *raga* and the time of day or night]

Bhawalkar: As far as my perspective and views on this are concerned, I think that the time of singing does have an influence (on what is to be sung), on those who sing, those who learn, and also on those who listen. But I think that a large part of this influence has to do with our nurture, our cultural conditioning. In the morning, when we get up, we are taught *raga* Bhairav. For later in the day, we are taught *raga* Todi, and so on. Likewise, in the afternoon *raga* Sarang or *raga* Bhimpalas and Multani. I do not know if there is a scientific reason for this time correlation. There may well be, but I am not aware of that. Regardless, such associations have become part of our culture, just as greeting our elders respectfully with our hands is part of our culture; likewise, with the correlation between *ragas* and time-zones. But let me tell you something else: when one hums a *raga* to oneself, when it occurs to us spontaneously from inside, then, oftentimes, it is free of time constraints.

Ravindra: Yes, it depends on one's mental state.

Bhawalkar: Such spontaneous inspiration produces very beautiful singing, even better than what one might do on stage. In such cases, the time of day is irrelevant. Why should that be so? I feel that when one's internal state of being harmonizes well with a *raga*, then that matters far more than the issue of time-correlation. But we are all products of our culture. Therefore, when I go to listen to a performance in the morning, I will want to hear a morning-*raga*, and it won't feel right to listen to some evening or night-*ragas* like Yaman or Bageshri. That is due to our cultural conditioning. Let me tell you: in the South, people tell me, "I listen to your CD, but only in the morning" – and note, the *raga* happens to be Malkauns (a night-*raga*)! He likes listening to a night-*raga* in the morning! What's to be done about that!? How far there might be a correlation between a *raga* and the time of day or night when it is sung or heard is difficult to say. It is a highly subjective matter.

Ravindra: Let us turn now to a discussion of some *ragas*. Marwa, Sohini, and Puriya ... all three *ragas* have the same notes, yet they differ from one another – It would be good if you could demonstrate the differences between them. And if you could tell us which one you like the most, though it may well be that you like them all.

[Three different *ragas*, but the same notes]

Bhawalkar: To tell you honestly, I have no such preferences. It is my prayer to each *raga* that it should grant me the privilege of a place at its feet. As to a guru, one prays to each *raga*, and one submits oneself humbly to each. I can say this much, that my *taleem* (study) of these *ragas* began with Puriya. First Puriya, then, little by little, I started with Sohini, and then, Marwa. I feel that

singing Marwa is rather more difficult than singing Puriya. Because the balancing of the Re in Marwa, especially the handling of Re, and the dialogues it has, especially with notes like Dha and Sa ... to sustain all these relations is difficult – not that singing Puriya is easy. Or it may be that I feel this way simply because I learnt Puriya first!

[Demonstration] Now you see, its Re note ... [demonstrates] That showed how the Re note has to be managed.

And then how the Dha note is treated ... [Demonstration] And the Ma, and Ga, and Ni notes. It is about how the Re note can penetrate, as into the Ma note...

[Demonstration of the interplay of significant notes in *raga* Puriya]

This brings us to the *chalan* (progression) of the *raga*, as in *khyal* ... the phrase Ni Re, Ni Ma is very important. [Further demonstration in *raga* Puriya] There is a delicacy to the notes: The Re slides over smoothly like fingers over butter! The Dha note too has to be managed similarly. And now see what happens here ...

[Demonstrates] See how that becomes Sohini! For the rest, as you know, *raga* Sohini is *uttar-anga* (predominantly sung in the higher octave). There is also the Sa Re combination in it that is not in Puriya, nor in Marwa. How we sing the key notes determines which *raga* it will be. And the presentation of the Re note, it is not just reduced... [Demonstrates Ma, Ga, Re, Sa ...] This is not the Re of Puriya.

[Demonstrates how the Re note is treated in Puriya] It is to be sung in such a way as to evoke the mood and temper of the *raga*. Likewise, with Marwa. When my guru used to teach the *raga*, he used to say, “It should feel like someone is pulling you upwards by your hair!” Its Ni, Dha, Re are all high up in terms of their pitch.

[Demonstration of *raga* Marwa] How high that Re note! ... [Demonstration of *raga* Marwa continues] ... See how that note was managed!

[Marwa demonstration continues] ... This then is how it proceeds ... Dha Ni Re, Re Ni Dha, and so on ... many patterns develop along these lines. It is very beautiful. And this is how we sing its Re note. I do believe, and my guru – [sings] Ni Re Ga Ma Dha – did not teach us to sing Marwa like that.

[Demonstrates how he was taught to sing the pattern Ni Re Ga Ma Dha Ma Ga Re]

Ravindra: Wonderful!

Bhawalkar: [Demonstration continues ...Ma Ni Dha, Re Ga Ma, Dha Ma Ga Re] He used to say: “Don’t go straight up like that and stand stiff!”

[Sings:] “Ni Re Ga Ma Dha, Dha, Ma Dha” – Doesn’t sound good (maybe sometimes)! It must be done in such a way that Re stands out in its unifying role. 38.16-38.22: There may be differences of opinion here, but that is what I think distinctive (about Marwa).

As for Sohini, it has a rather different temperament. [Demonstration of *raga* Sohini in *dhrupad* style]

[*Bandish* and *alap* in *dhrupad*]

Ravindra: In *raga*-music, the *bandish* has a significant role. How do you make your selection of *bandishes*? And the *bandishes* you sang today, from which gurus did you get them?

Bhawalkar: The *bandish* is indeed very important in *raga*-music. The *bandish* is a crucial means towards understanding a *raga*. My guru did indeed begin teaching with a *bandish*. And even after having taught the *bandish*, would sometimes say, “Come on, sing the *alap* in this *raga*,” and that would put me in a spot of bother. How to start? What to do? The *bandish* is learnt, but how to sing the *alap*? Because “*alap*” is an entirely different subject. But sometimes it has also happened that after learning the *bandish*, I have tried on my own to sing an *alap*. On one occasion, when I was singing, *Bade Ustad* (Zia Mohiuddin Dagar) happened to be there, had opened the door, and was listening, and he said, “Son, good, you are doing well...” – the *raga* was *Desi*. I had been taught a beautiful *bandish*: “*Udho tum jaye, kahiyo Hari paas, tum bina kaise phagun maas?*” [Go to Hari (Krishna) and tell him, how is the month of Phagun to be lived without him?]

[Demonstration of *bandish* in *raga* *Desi*] It is such a beautiful *bandish*. The sentiment too. On that basis I tried to sing *alap*. And as I said, *Bade Ustad* complimented me on that. As you see, sometimes things go well in this way. Learning a *bandish* well is indeed very important requirement. And the *bandish* should be of a proper kind ... one that shows the form of the *raga* – because I have seen with some *bandishes* that they fail to bring out the nature of the *raga*. And this applies even to other forms of classical singing, as I see where I teach in the SRA (Kolkata), that some people sing in ways that have the *bandish* but leave the *raga*-form unclear. This issue needs thinking about. *Bandishes* must be learned in such a way that the picture of the *raga* becomes very clear.

Ravindra: I have another question in the context of the *bandish*. Various themes figure in our *bandishes*. With reference to the *dhrupad* form of singing, what are the characteristic themes of *bandishes* in *dhrupad*? And is there any inclination in contemporary *dhrupad* to create new *bandishes*?

[*Bhakti* (devotion)]

Bhawalkar: Yes, indeed, very much so. The main subject of our cultural tradition has been *bhakti* (devotion). In our culture, regardless of how much studying or business activity is done, it'll be said, “Go worship at a temple, light a joss-stick ... because without devotion, your life is not going to be fulfilled.” Therefore, *bhakti* is ever-present, and I'd say that it is a state of mind. One may chant “*Rama Krishna, Ram Krishna,*” but if one's mind is elsewhere, then the chanting is of no use. *Bhakti* can be done through music; *bhakti* can be done through words. It is a state of being. I can illustrate the point through an interview of *Gangubai Hangal* by *Ashok Ranade*. He asked, “In your *khyal* programs, do you not conclude with any *bhajans* or devotional verses?” She answered, “Whatever I sing, I sing with devotion; what need then of singing *bhajans*?” It feels so wonderful when *khyal* creates an elevated state of being, but to sing a *bhajan* after that brings it down. I repeat the claim: devotion is a state of being. As for *dhrupad*, it is largely based on feelings of devotion. In order for it to be easier to sing as well as to listen. There are many *padas* (verses) which describe nature. Many verses devoted to *shringar rasa* (the aesthetics of the erotic). Some claim (mistakenly) that *shringar* does not figure in *dhrupad*. That *dhrupad* is a *vira rasa gayaki* (focused on the aesthetic emotion of valor). Hardly! That aesthetic emotion is hardly suited for singing anyway. Elements of *vira rasa* can occur from moment to moment in singing, but it is not something sustainable (in classical music). (Jokingly) How is the *Re* note in *Puriya* to be sung with *vira rasa* in mind!? Or its *Ma* note! Anyway, *sangeet shastra* (music as art and craft) and the philosophy of music reveal our culture. There are many verses which show this. Let me illustrate our philosophy of music through a verse:

Prathama sur sadhe, ratte naam, jo lau rahe, Yahi ghata me praghata praan

How beautiful! “Pratham sur sadhe”: first manage the notes. That is done through “ratte naam” (frequent repetition of words/names). “Jo lau rahe”: that is, with single-mindedness, as in a flame (at its wick). “Yahi ghata me”: in this moment. “Jo praan hai”: the God-given breath/life that is there ... to do sadhana (to meditate on that). This is such a beautiful example. Likewise, as in the Malkauns that I sang:

Poojan chali Mahadeva, Chandra-badani, Mriga-nayani ... Hansa-gamani Parvati. What a wonderful description (of goddess Parvati)!

Kar liye agrathaal, pushpanake udhe haar, Mukha diye Raja raya, Devanadev Mahadeva, Sacha nakha shikha sola hu shringar, Barani na jaye sundarta chhabi, Tansena dhoopa deepa naivedya le dhyan lago, Hara Hara Hara Hara Adi Deva ... Poojan chali ...

So much *shringar* as well as *bhakti* (sensuousness and devotion)! Here, if you wish to engage in combat with the pakhawaj, then the dhrupad can't be held responsible for that! Therefore, when singing a verse, one must keep an eye on its limits. How one utters its words, and all that. What people like or don't like is not our worry. This is a very important point. There are any number of *dhrupad* verses evoking *shringar* (amorous desire).

Ravindra: We would love to hear a verse of that nature.

Bhawalkar: I will sing a verse by Baiju, whose words illustrate something new. I too have composed 60 to 70 verses.

[Demonstration of verses evoking *shringar rasa*]

Sundara ati naveena... pravina maha chatura,
Mriga-nayani mana-harani, champaka barani naar,
Sundara ati naveena, nabhi saroja, shri phala uroja,
Chandra-badani, shuka nasika, bhowe dhanushya,
Kama dhara, sundara ati naveena,
Anga anga sugandha, gunjata suwasa, awat nahi krodha,
hanta swarupa, Barana ke bhaar, sundara ati naveena,
Dhana dhana tako bhaga, jaso piya paat,
Baiju Prabhu basa kara line, kama jala dala,
Sundara ati naveenar ...

Ravindra: Wah! (Wonderful!)

Bhawalkar: There are many compositions like this, though I am poor in not knowing more of them ... but a vast storehouse exists ... though many have been lost, as also with *khyal bandishes*. A lot has been lost despite our school system, or through lack of transmission. But regardless, we do not lack for compositions.

Ravindra: Has the notation of *dhrupad* verses taken place the way Pandit Bhatkhande transcribed *khyal* compositions?

Bhawalkar: Bhatkhande's is a major achievement. In addition to that, others have collected verses.

Ravindra: Were you permitted to write down verses?

Bhawalkar: Yes, I was. My guru wanted me first to sit and learn. The writing down of verses could be done later. With my own students, I tell them: "Do write down compositions." Because writing down makes many things clear. But it is just as important, or even more important to be able to free oneself from that. If one is not able to free oneself from that habit, it can keep one trapped. If one could learn everything from books, what need of a guru!? How would one acquire knowledge? How to sing a note correctly is hardly to be learned from a book.

[The rhythm-patterns of *dhrupad*]

Ravindra: *Dhrupad* uses a variety of *taals* (rhythmic patterns). What are those *taals*? And I have a related question regarding the practice in *dhrupad* of marking time with one's hand: what is the reason for that?

Bhawalkar: Yes, there is a reason. *Gayaki* (singing style) and *taal* (rhythms) developed hand in hand. Some have even composed *bandishes* (verses) on the basis of rhythmic patterns. The main pattern in *dhrupad* is *chautal*, with 12 *matra* (beats). Other patterns include *dhamar*. *Dhamar* and *dhrupad* are similar in structure. The difference is that *dhamar* is used mostly in *hori* (light classical form), or for verses related to *shringar* (amorous desire). *Dadra* is both the name of a *taal* and a form of vocal music. Similarly, *Dhamar* is both a *taal* and a form of vocal music. *Dhrupad* has *chautal* and *jhaptal*. The latter is also called *sadra* by some. Then there is *tivra*, which has 7 beats: this is known *rupak* in *khyal* singing. There is also *sool taal*. This is played only on the *pakhawaj*. It is an ancient pattern. It has 10 beats. In *jhaptal* the 10 beats divide into groups of 2, 3, 2, 3 ... while in *sool taal* the 10 beats are divided into 5 pairs of 2. *Chautal* and *sool taal* are both very important in *dhrupad*. The *bandishes* in *chautal* are generally in medium tempo. There are some brisk *bandishes* in *chautal*, but generally fast *bandishes* are sung in *sool taal*.

Ravindra: I'd like to ask another question: in Carnatic (South Indian) classical music, there are those who play the *mridangam* (drum similar to *pakhawaj*) ... They know the *bandishes*, and sometimes improvise during a performance. Can Pratap here do the same?

Bhawalkar: Indeed, he can and does, but I'd urge him to learn to do that even more! For accompanists to understand *bandishes* is very good. This is as true for the *tabla*. The better you know the *bandish* the more immersed you will be in it. The closer the tempo and *bandish*, the more the pleasure. Knowing a *bandish* is good for the accompanist. As to your question about keeping time with one's hand ... it is a very ancient tradition in our culture, both in the North and the South. And in *dhrupad*, I am constantly improvising, and so also Pratap (on the *pakhawaj*). He is playing along with my singing. While doing that he cannot also beat time. Then who shall mark time? It is my responsibility to keep time with my hand.

[The concept of *upaj*: spontaneous creative flexibility]

And we do that in a variety of ways: that is called *upaj* (ornamental variations in rhythm or melody). Within the *bandish* in *dhrupad*, some recognize various divisions and components or parts, which are part of tradition. What I learned from my gurus was the "*upaj anga*". "*Upaj*" – if I may try to explain it – can be described as spontaneous creativity. That which is not pre-composed or pre-planned is *upaj*. That which is created in the moment. It is an aspect of *taleem* (practice): by virtue of long practice, that you discover ways and means of being spontaneously creative. There is no rule for this kind of creativity. What comes into you (as inspiration) you bring out (as performance). It can come

about anywhere: as an aspect of *alap*, melody, or the *raga*. Or as an aspect of *tala* (rhythm), *laya* (tempo) or words (the composition). Any one aspect being foregrounded, such as *alap*, does not mean that the aspects of *raga* or *tala* will be neglected. Those continue in their way, and you will see the whole *raga* as a picture before your eyes. Notes or words will come to the fore depending on where the *upaj* is at work most. That is how it works; but how one must sing is not entirely fixed. Two or three or four of these aspects can sometimes work together.

Ravindra: If we could have a little demonstration ... as you explained just now.

Bhawalkar: Yes, I shall do that in *raga* Multani, in *sooltaal*.

[Demonstration in *raga* Multani (*sooltaal*) Composition: Rajata Shiva Shankar]

The rhythm is in *sooltaal* ... ten *matra* (beats). [He shows with hand, and words, how they proceed ...] If found convenient, the ten can also be counted in sets of 5 ... [Demonstrates with hands and words how the 1 to 5 set is marked twice.]

[The ten beats are now voiced via the syllables for the *pakhawaj*]

Its original name was “*usule fakta*”: “*fakta*” is the name for a type of bird ... Its “*usul*” – [shows the movement of wings with his arms] ... The bird’s wing movements are an imaginative explanation for the origin of the rhythm.

Rajata Shiva Shankar, Bhola Natha, Rudra Narayan Deva, Rajata Shiva Shankar

Now this was the *sthayi* of the *bandish* (composition). The sections of *dhrupad* are: 1. *Alap*, 2. *Nomtom*, 3. *Sthayi*, 4. *Antara*, 5. *Abhog*, 6. *Sanchari*. After the *sthayi*, the first thing I must attend to is my *laya* (tempo). My tempo, my singing, my enunciation of words, the presentation of the *bandish* (composition) ... first, these things; then, attention to the meaning of the *bandish* ... after all, the *bandish* does have some meaning. “*Rajata*” has some meaning. “*Re Na Na*” does not, nor “*Ri Ra*.” Something is afoot there too: Sanskrit scholars have something to say about that. They will ascribe a significance to “*Re*” and “*Na*” and so on. But by and large most of us take those sounds to have no semantic content. What does “*Rajat*” mean? “*seated (on a bright throne).*”

Shiva Shankara, Bhola Nath, Rudra Narayan Deva Raja (names of Shiva)

The *antara* (4th section of *dhrupad*) is: *Adi Mahadeva, Jogi Nijananda*

So, the words must evoke an image before the mind’s eye; that is essential. Whatever the composition, the aim of *upaj* singing is to evoke the image suggested by the words.

Rajata Shiva Shankar [The same words sung in a variety of improvised ways – illustrating *upaz*]

Now, to illustrate *svar* (*upaz*, i.e. free creativity regarding notes) ... [Demonstration of *svar-upaz*]
Rajata Shiva Shankar

My attention was on how might handle the *Pa* note. This was about *svar* (notes). Now *raga-anga* (improvisation regarding the *raga* aspect).

[Demonstration of *raga-upaz*] Rajata Shiva Shankar ... My aim here was to take up the phrases where the *raga* opens up, and then do *vistaar* (expansive development of the *raga*). After this comes an example of *shabda-upaz* (improvisation focusing on the words of the composition)

[Demonstration of *shabda-upaz*] Rajata Shiva Shankara, Bhola Nath, Rudra Narayan Deva ... Here, the words of the composition are foregrounded.

[Demonstration of *shabda-upaz*] Rajata Shiva Shankara, Bhola Nath, Rudra Narayan Deva. Here the words are sung in a variety of ways.

Now *laya* (tempo) as with the current tempo: [Demonstration of tempo-improvisation] Rajata Shiva Shankara ... Here, the movement goes along with the *laya* (tempo) ... [Demonstration of tempo-improvisation] Rajata Shiva Shankara, Bhola Nath, Rudra Narayan Deva

After this, *tala* (rhythm). We do this [hand movement to mark time]

[Marking time in *dhrupad*]

Ravindra: What is the play of variations possible with *tala* (rhythm)? Either from the *laya* (tempo) perspective, or from the perspective of *matra* (beats): dropping a beat or varying the beat?

Bhawalkar: None of this is pre-determined. When a variation will be done is improvised. There is also an element of Question-&-Answer to this part. It should not be theatrical. Not: "I do this, then you do this, and people will clap." Not like that. It has to be done as part of the music ... with an aesthetic dimension to the relation between tempo and rhythm.

[Demonstration of interplay between tempo and beat] Rajata Shiva Shankara, Bhola Nath, Rudra Narayan Deva ... Now he (Pratap, the pakhawaj player) had become free there. He was playing music. My hand movement keeps the rhythm going. Now if I let go of the rhythm, then I'll drown, and so will he!

[Demonstration of interplay between tempo and beat continued] Rajata Shiva Shankara, Bhola Nath, Rudra Narayan Deva ...

[Demonstration of interplay between tempo and beat continued] Rajata Shiva Shankara, Bhola Nath, Rudra Narayan Deva ... So, in these ways, we try to embellish the *bandish* (composition). The aim is to preserve the beauty of the *bandish*, as far as possible. To sustain it. To present it in an aesthetic manner. The aesthetic element should come to the fore. *Svar* (melody), *raga*, *laya* (tempo), *tala* (rhythm) – all these, when we study them, lead on to the next stage – that of art. One's education, practice, thinking – all one's abilities used to that end.

[*Bani* or *gharanas* in *dhrupad*]

Ravindra: It is known that in *dhrupad*, there are various *gharanas* or *bani* (tongues, traditions, lineages): four main lineages are generally mentioned. Which lineage do you represent?

Bhawalkar: Yes, there are four lineages: Gauharbani, Nauharbani, Khandarbani and Dagarbani. There have been many learned people among these *gharanas*, though few are left today. But there are some singers in the Gauharbani and Khandarbani traditions. The Mallik tradition, the Betia and the Vishnupur traditions, the Talwandi tradition, in the Punjab before Partition, since then in Pakistan. These are the traditions that continue. Of all these the Dagarbani style has been the most successful. I learned the Dagarbani style of *dhrupad* from my gurus. But my guru was of the strong view – though a member of the Dagar family – he used to say, "The Sangeet-Ratnakar (early 13th c.) of Sarangadeva is a very great and respected work on music." In it there is a chapter on "Panchageet." It does not discuss styles or forms. It has a discussion about how *svara* (notes) are to be sung: nothing about *gharana* or form; simply about how notes are to be sung. The distinctions made in that chapter are between: Shuddha, Bhinna, Gaudi, Vega-svara, and Sadharini, and "Sadharini" is a sum-total of the other four. My guru is to say, "Son, what we sing is the 'Sadharini' mode." The Dagarbani style is there, of course, but when he used to discuss these issues, when it came to tracing the origins of how we came to sing in our style, then the "Sadharini" mode provides an explanation.

Ravindra: In your singing, how is that which you got from your gurus, and that which comes from your own thinking reflected? And after so many years of singing, what changes do you notice in your style? If we listen to your singing of 20 years ago, and how you sing now, as with any performer, one reaches a stage in which one steps outside one's former self towards a new path.

[Change and novelty in musical style]

Bhawalkar: Yes, it is true what you say. What happens is a natural progression in which a new learner first imitates his guru. Listening to the guru, he tries to sing exactly like that. After that, as happened with me as well, the singing changes. Thirty, and twenty, and ten years ago no doubt, I sang differently. These changes kept happening, because as with any artist, the perspective changed as how one sees things in music and what one hears changed. One's experience too develops further. A change does come about. But I will also say this, that my guru was very able in this respect, in that he respected tradition but did not believe that it required an exact duplication of what was passed on. He was always keen to bring innovation and originality into his singing. And the search for novelty removes the artist's ego. So long as there is ego, novelty is unlikely to come into art. Our difficulty as singers is this: the *raga* is fixed, so are the notes, then how is one to introduce novelty? My view regarding originality is that one should start from a position of *shunyanata* (emptiness, a Buddhist concept) ... a position devoid of ego in approaching the *alap*, the *bandish*, and the *raga*. Then many new things can come about, even though some things get repeated, and that is inevitable, since repetition is intrinsic to our music, but new things get added to it. My guru was clear about this: "Do learn from me – but sing what comes from your mind and being." I follow that advice, and in doing so, I don't think I play fast and loose with anything I learned from my gurus. Change is inevitable. But I sing what I think I am (what I continue to be). Put another way: What I have learned, I wish to present through my own perspective.

Ravindra: Let me ask my final question, which is related to this topic. Teaching too enhances one's knowledge and understanding. How one teaches one's students can also change one's own perspective. When you teach your students, what are the things that you attend to? Do you suit the teaching to what you judge to be the capability of the student? Or do you have some other considerations in mind?

Bhawalkar: Of course, students are at varying levels, and what is taught is meant to match their level. That is necessary. But in addition, from what I have learnt as a student and what I wished I had known sooner when I was a student. Things which I might have done better if I had known something sooner. These thoughts, and the shortcomings in me that I'd like to prevent in my students ... I work hard at these. And I've also reached the point where I make the outline of a *raga* very clear from the outset. My *Bade Ustad*, in teaching a *raga*, for example, Komal Rishabh Asavari ... would also show Bilaskhani Todi – "Don't have to sing it all now" – and Bhairavi. "Son, from here it becomes Bilaskhani; this makes it Bhairavi." Similar with Puriya, Deskar, Bhoop, and so on. That is how he used to teach. Very important to establish what makes for a *raga*, where it opens up ... where its unique note-pattern comes in. It is important to learn these things. After that comes *vistaar* (expansive development). This depends on the power of one's creative imagination. As one's power of imaginative develops, the two can grow together.

Ravindra: Many, many thanks!

Bhawalkar: Thanks.