

# **Kumarji And His Gayki**

**By**

**Chinmoy Khaladkar.**

This is an attempt to take a look at Kumajir's Gayaki. The statement is made thus as new parameters will have to be generated and will have to be evolved in order to inquire into his Gayaki. This also will produce an answer about his pre-illness and post-illness Gayaki, a complete and drastic change and evolution in respect of the same. Where he not only triumphed over his illness and impending death but also triumphed over himself to achieve the lonely peak of self realization. In fact we will have to do a Kumarji on Kumajir. In other words, we will have to approach Kumajir the way he approached Indian Classical Vocal.

This generates, in a way, a methodological problem. To appreciate Kumajir's contribution to the Classical Vocal, it is necessary to have a hawk view of Indian Philosophy in general, the concept of Moksha as an unattainable attainable. The concept of Temple (Mandir) and its philosophical connotation i.e. "representation of Cosmos as contemplated by human beings in this world." And then all the arts which evolved out of the aforesaid institution. Then Indian Classical Vocal, its evolution and Kumarji's place in it. Etc Etc.

Though these all topics by themselves constitute a separate topic of an article, they are mentioned so as to place Kumarji and his Gayki in perspective. The readers will be able to tie this thread to his Gayki as this perspective will progress.

Kumarji has extensively spoken about his Guruji, Prof B.R.Deodhar and the vision which Deodhar gave him. It is clear that it was Deodhar who handed him over the keys of the universe which none of the contemporary pedigree Ustad/ Gayaks would have been able to do. So what is that made Kumarji ? lets us apply a deductive logic here . What was the identity of Kumarji? He was a classicist by training, an innovator by a temperament (a fiercely independent temperament), a poet by feeling and a thinker by inclination. And it was a clash of these identities which symbolized his Gayki.

Kumarji in 1940s had already realized that all existing Gharanas and their musical content was not the "music" he sought to convey, neither he wanted to . In his opinion the contemporaray thought could not have been the basis to search the root of the music.He

had heard the prevalent Gayaki in extenso and had also interacted with the Maestros like Khan Saheb Alladiya Khan and others. This all exploration had already led to the thought that he would never render any contemporaneous Gayaki and would render something which nobody would till then would have thought of. On this background, He conceived a new vision. It was borne out of his deep study, understanding and thinking. It took different lineaments and had entirely unusual conception but was based on the moorings which were instilled in him by his Guruji. His Gayaki was like the birth of Aadi Shankaracharya who had arrived to reinterpret Hindu Dharma.

Amongst his earlier renderings, fortunately for us there is a recording of 1947 which is available. It is 80 minutes of rendering. Of A Bada Khyal in Todi and a Bhajan. The Tanpuras are not as piquantly present as they are later; in each of his concert. There is a significant emphasis on Vilambit. In its youthful exuberance, there is an attempt to prove his mastery over all the Ashtangas. The pace of musical idioms is breathtaking. They come one after another in such a manner that the listener is simply astounded. Its relentless pace does not give one a time to have a look at it for by that time the performer is already so much ahead and in a new idiom. There are powerful Boltaans. His taans are vigorous, cascading and powerful as if he is bent to prove that he had a voice that could do almost anything. They are full with intricate designs and are novel in its form. This feature was completely absent in his post-illness Gayaki.

What is important is that the approach borders somewhere in between Ragalapti and Roopakalpti. In that sense, an integrated form of design is yet to be crystallized. The Naad (resonance) in uttering musical phrases is absent. The laya of his bada Khyal is more vilambit than his later Madhya laya.

When Kumarji realized that the music which he wished to convey could not be conveyed in the then existing musical milieu, he went back to the basics. And the first feature of what was later known as Kumar Gayaki emerged. It was reinvention of Taanpura. He practically invented very many new concepts and discovered many “lost” factors which in his opinion could be only found out if one can use Taanpura as a canvass while rendering a Raga. Understanding Taanpura led him to formulate his unique approach to Swara, Bandish and Raga. All this was based on Madhya Laya.

And clue to his entire Gayaki is found only in one utterance. Please note that Kumarji has never ever spoken about “HIS” Gayaki anywhere. He spoke about how a raga is to be rendered or how should be a Swara-lagav or various other things but never ever on his creativity or his Gayaki (Mukkam Vashi –not a single word about HIS music.).

In 1960s he had told this to a group of American language teachers assembled in Delhi that

*“Someone who did not know the nature of silence can neither speak nor sing. Both these abilities were built on the substance of silence and it demands the knowledge that at the very centre of every Swara, there is hidden a vast space of impenetrable silence.”*

Kumajir’s post-illness singing certainly embodied this knowledge.

Now let us analyze it one by one

The most remarkable evolution was about Swara. Kumarji treated every swara was in principle a Shadj and discovered its Harmonics.. This laid a foundation of a thought that this Shadja, as its name implies, had six different regions encapsulated within it, Kumarji was able to cultivate a vocal access towards all of these six regions. This imagination that to imagine every Swara of the scale as about an inch broad, the six regions within it and the realization that it is in this region that the elusive power of Swara resides was an extraordinary level of intellectual and musical intelligence. When we listen to him, we notice that region just beneath his voice and those nearly inaudible intimations lurking within it that throbbed with life which is the essence of Swara.

That is how he rendered every Swara. And then emerged an understanding of Raga. With this perspective towards Swara, Kumarji always viewed a Raga as an organic entity having life of its own. Ragas transcend the Art and the Science. He became aware that they are never static. They grew and were reborn every time when you sing them. You have to invoke them. And this power of regeneration lay hidden in the scales of the Ragas was their inner life. And then (must have) emerged the perception of the fact that how to embark on this journey of exploring the realm of Unknown with the help of 12 tangible Swaras.

Then came the Bandish. On this background, if we see any Kumar rendering after 1960s, he treated it as a lone factor having a nearly objective existence in the ocean of Ragas.. He perceived its tough, literary and musical core hidden like a filament; within a musical DNA that holds the Bandish as real as any objective.

One can see two different landscapes in Kumarji’s Gayaki . one is of that of a Raga, and the other is that of Bandish. He often restricted himself to the needs of the Khayal as it emerged and as it stood at that point of time when he was rendering. His renderings of the Bandish seemed always revelatory, like a prophesy.

This takes us to Laya. There were two main reasons for Madhya-Laya. One was the fact that it was completely natural (Naisargik) Laya. Second was that he considered the prevalent Vilambit and its pacing irrelevant for the musical content and the intentions of his Khyal .It was this belief that this Laya would be the key to open the throbbing

universe of the chosen Bandish of the Khyal gave his rendering a different dimension altogether. His breath was also sufficient for his musical needs. The pauses were a waiting in order to make it sure that a lyrical and a musical idea which he wanted to convey had duly registered in the minds of his listeners. A silence was to show us as to what were his needs in the world he had chosen to create as well as the contours of his world at the point of time.

This was his post-illness Gayki which we all are accustomed to listen to. However, one thing is certain. Whatever words you use, they are futile for they can not capture the magic of his elusive music which is extraordinary agile. For it captivates you ,it appears at once full of weight and quick moving like a drop of Mercury which is difficult to grasp. It eludes you easily and once it does so there is nothing which you have grasped. Once it is over, nothing remains behind for proper assessment and for analysis.

Whether Kumarji has produced a Gharana or would produce it seems somewhat irrelevant. Kumarji was of a firm belief , and he has gone on record to say that “whoever sings his own music will sing my music “. His Shishyas are illustrious and many. Many also claim to have learnt from him. But out of this galaxy, his elder son Mukul Shivputra is the only one who has been able to carve out a niche for himself and that too on the lines of Kumarji. He seems the only one who is singing/rendering “his own “music.

However, for serious listeners I would like to suggest that they should listen to following Bandishes and their rendering by Kumarji. This would certainly enchant them and pave a way towards understanding the man and his music.

- Banu Re Balaiyya (Kalyan)
- Naina Nahi Mane (Naiki-Kanada)
- Ham Bhaye Jangam(Malkauns)
- Kaise Tum Ho Murakh (Komal Bageshri)
- Aayo Rang Phag (Bhimpalas)
- Wa Ki Chhaba (Bhimpalas)
- Piharwa Ana Hi (Shyam-Kalyan)
- Sagara Sab Ban Phula (Todi)
- Sundar Mukh Tero (Darbari)
- Ye Sab Bhaye Shohar (Malkauns)
- Mori Kar Pakarat (Dhani)
- Aav Ban Jara (Jaijaiwanti)
- Nur Bhar Pur (Lalat)
- Mukh Aa Dar dan (Kaushi-Kanada)

- Sapne Me Milati Tu (Basant)
- Ja Jyo Re Badarwa (Malhar)
- Aa Ja Re Ghar (Bilaskhani)
- Sundar Nayan (Shankara)
- Mehal Mandarmahi Re (Kanada)
- Chhand Mayi (Bhoop)
- Ghungat Kholo Na Ji (Gauri)
- Sanjani Gao (Puriya)
- Ariya Bira Mhara Ho (Dhanashri)