

Biography of Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande

Pandit Vishnu Naaraayan Bhaatkhande has a very important place in the history of Hindustani classical music. There was a time when darkness reined in the classical music field due to ignorance, characters or patterns of raagas were unclear. During this time, Pandit Bhaatkhande tirelessly travelled, studied ancient books, consulted senior musicians and tenaciously established clear understanding of practical and theoretical aspects of Hindustani classical music.

He was born in a respected Brahmin family in a district of Mumbai, in a town called Waalkeshwar, on 10th August, 1860. He received a legacy of love of music from his parents. As a child, when he heard his mother singing a song, he would immediately imitate it. Along with his excellent education in schools and colleges, he continued his quest to study classical music. He played Sitaar very well and also learnt vocal music. He started practicing law after finishing his B.A L.L.B studies. He used to frequent music concerts and carefully listened to many vocalists and instrumentalists. That is when he realized that many accomplished artists are not familiar with rules of raagas and moreover, they are not even interested in music theory.

After observing this state of music field, he decided to improve the situation in both practical and theory of classical music. First he travelled in southern part of India in 1904. He extensively researched ancient books, carefully studied Vyankatmakhee's theory of seventy two thaat (or mel). He had discussions with many well-known musicians. Similarly, he travelled northern part of India and learnt about North Indian classical or Hindustani classical music. When some musicians refused to teach him anything unless he made a commitment by a formal ceremony of '**Gandaa-Bandhan**', Pandit Bhaatkhande did not hesitate and went through with the ceremony. ('Gandaa-Bandhan' or 'Amulet Bond' is 'tying a musical knot': in older days, a student and teacher would formally commit to study music in a ceremony where a teacher would tie a gandaa or an amulet on student's wrist. This was a serious mutual commitment and promise from both student and teacher.) He wanted to acquire knowledge in the field of music by any means necessary and he did not have any ego or false pride. He observed that in north India, there is a Raag – Raagini' system that has some faults and shortcomings. Pandit Bhaatkhande published six consecutive books where he consolidated Khyaal, Dhrupad, Dhamaar etc. and that opened a treasure trove of music knowledge to all musicians. He organized music conferences in many cities across India. In these conferences, many music scholars exchanged ideas and presented their theories. First conference was in Barodaa in 1916, and a proposal was brought forward to establish 'All India Music Academy'. These conferences helped spreading music. He established music colleges at many places and started organized or institutionalized programs for studying music. In Lakhnow, he established 'Mairis Music College', which is now called 'Bhaatkhande University of Music'. 'Madhav Sangeet Vidyaalay' in Gwalior and Music College in Baroda are noteworthy. Bhaatkhande ji published four books called 'Bharatiya Sangeet Paddhati' in Marathi language. These books contain valuable collection of well researched complicated topics in music. He also wrote an amazing Sanskrit book called 'Lakshya Sangeetam'. From books like "Short Historical Survey", "A Comparative Study"; it is obvious that for enhancement of art of music, Bhatkhande ji worked very hard. In many world class universities, his 'Kramik Pustak Maalika' (Successive book series) is adopted as a standard text book. With " Vishnu Sharmaa " as a pen name, he wrote "Shreemallakshya Sangeetam" and "Abhinav Geet Manjaree". With a nick name "Chatur", he wrote several compositions, hence he is also known as "Chatur Pandit Bhaatkhande".

With Pandit Bhaatkhande's efforts, Indian classical music (both theory and practical) became well organized. Instead of raag - raagini system, ten thaat were established. Ancient music practice and theory was changed during muslim period. Pandit Bhaatkhande supported it with new theories and made it stable. He created a written script for

writing music. He obtained ancient hereditary Hindi compositions from families of musicians (khandani or gharaanaa) and consulted Hindi linguists and scholars to give them a wholesome, refined form. He published these compositions in six volumes of 'Kramik Pustam Maalikaa'. With his Sanskrit book "Lakshya Sangeetam", he constructed a strong scientific support for modern music. He did not feel insulted when he had to commit to a "Gandaa Bandhan" ceremony to obtain know how from other artists. He travelled tirelessly to hunt for ancient books. In music conferences, he collected artists from various traditions and gharaanaas on same pulpit or stage. He organized panels for interactions of thoughts and opinions, determined verified forms of raagaas, discussed theories, formed solid connection between music theory and practice.

He was very disciplined during his journeys, and did not waste time in sightseeing historic or tourist places. He did not like to waste time in attending or hosting parties. If someone gave him an address of a musician or music scholar, he would make the journey no matter how far. While studying books, if some topics were difficult to understand, he would discuss them with scholars to make it simple.

He was a selfless person. He did not desire money. He shied away from fame. He learnt Urdu and Farsi language from 'Munshi', so he could understand books written in Urdu and Farsi. When he found a rare composition, he would show it to his friend Mr. Girishrao Karnaad and ask for his opinion. He used to make three copies of rare bandishes or compositions. One for himself, one for his good student Shreekrushna Naaraayan Raatanjankar and one for Girishrao Karnaad ji. His watchfulness about studies is evident in many ways.

He had great faith. Every morning after a bath and sandhyaa (prayer), he used read Rudra. He fell ill in 1935. Until then in his first 75 years of life, he was fairly healthy. He was uneasy for the last year of his life and this master mind of music passed away on 19th September 1936.