

# USTAD A. RAHIMUDDIN KHAN DAGUR'

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The man who could make our singing seem sublime<sup>2</sup> is now no more. Ustad Rahimuddin Khan Dagur passed away on November 20, last year; and a whole form of music has suffered an eclipse. Our *alapa*, of the *dhrupa-pada* variety, images pure music. The Ustad was a master *alapiya*, and I see no immediate parallel.

Times without number, I recall, I have been raised by the power of his music into a kind of deep, emancipated feeling which would not be a matter of mere agreeable sound, but the effect of turning to thoughts and images of sheer unboundedness. I would feel, in addition, a certain elevation of the self where the *rasika* does not merely listen, but (in a way) inhales, and grows into an influence that makes him feel better and purer, and not only sweeter after the recital.

Plotinus has characterized art as 'metaphysical homesickness'. Tagore, similarly, speaks of the 'lonely region of renunciation' to which our music can lift us. If comments such as these are meaningful to me, and I quite see they are, it is only in the light of the music of Khan Sahib. It may be that I seem a little unclear as I speak thus. But my purpose at the moment is to do some homage too, recalling how the music itself felt; and it seemed winged, I remember, in the manner I have referred to.

It has often been said that the music of India is rooted in its philosophy and religion. But this hardly squares with the run of Hindustani music today. I know of only one clear warrant of this time-honoured view; and that is the art of Rahimuddin Khan, *along with his singular way of discoursing on music*. Why I say so should be clear as the essay develops.

*Alapa* and *dhrupada*, we may note, are still said to be basic and respectable forms of Hindustani music. May be the remark is not always

meant. But one thing is patent. Knowledgeable and open-minded lovers of the art — many of them, today, from the West — are often found insisting that the effects that distinguish *alapa* at its best are quite beyond the reach of other musical forms. And this is perhaps true. *Dhruvapada* and *alapa* are not only distinct ways of setting *svaras* in relation to *tala*<sup>3</sup> and *laya*,<sup>4</sup> but a quite easy locus of experience that ‘chastens and subdues’, very much like prayer.

This is, however, possible only at a height. So, the death of Rahimuddin Khan has put a very heavy charge on his son, Fahimuddin,<sup>5</sup> and his nephews, the Dagar Brothers.<sup>6</sup> Luckily, they have quickly recovered; and, with the typical resilience of the dour Dagar family — which has carried aloft for so long the banner of these forms against great indifference — they have already begun pooling and perfecting the compositions and insights scattered among them by their truly great elders. Yet, some may feel unsure if it would be possible again to hear singing which so deeply satisfies as that of Rahimuddin Khan in spite, or because of a bias that seemed metaphysical.

### 1. The note as an ideal

What is this bias that I here speak of? The answer is provided by a rule which Khan Sahib himself would often quote: *digambar svara rakh re*. The meaning, for musical practice, is that the *svara* should be kept quite bare, rather than hidden in musical trellis-work. If this be taken along with our positive definition of *svara* as *swayameva rajate*, the full requirement would seem to be dual. The note should be sung sweetly, steadily; and not merely borrow beauty from the outside.

This may seem strange to most of us at present. For, today, as a rule, the music grows engaging only when the singer sets out to inweave *svaras* into patterns (or *taans*) of ever newer form. In general, it is only the *taar sa* that one renders with some effect. Otherwise, the notes only *make for* the effect of the whole; they rarely themselves radiate any beauty.

The ideal in question, on the other hand, is that even like the Ultimate<sup>7</sup> the *svara* is (to seem) self-luminous. And, for practice, the hint here is that just as in life, so in music, one mark of spirituality is abstention from mere ornament. In music *as art*, I may add, the purpose of *vilambit* is not only to take more time, but to work up effects of repose and tranquillity. To realise this end, every single *svara* must seem clearly itself;<sup>8</sup> and this is exactly what is just not permitted by the close, frisky form of *drut*.

### 2. Sur, alapa and the master

I am at once here reminded of an unforgettable recital by Rahimuddin

Khan in the Radio Sangeet Sammelan of 1956,<sup>9</sup> which elicited from the music critic of *The Times of India*, the very true comment :

“The finest recital of the day came from Rahim-ud-din Khan Dagar whose treatment of *lodi* was an embodiment of repose and tranquillity.”<sup>10</sup>

My own detailed write-up on the same may here be cited (with some changes) by way of explaining not merely what I have just said on *svara*, but the manner of this vocalist, and the nature and necessity of *alapa*:

“The opening brought out the very basic purpose of *alapa*, and also how music is a formal art. *Alapa* — that is, rendition of a *raga* independently of words — is required because . . . the quintessential fineness of music cannot bear the blight of words.<sup>11</sup> In music, as perhaps nowhere else the linguistic minimum is the aesthetical absolute; and that is what makes it a truly formal art. . . . There are, of course, no words in *alapa*. But Rahimuddin Khan’s very manner . . . soft as dew . . . did it ever blight the *svara*?

His attitude to a note is profoundly different from that of the average singer. It is throughout gentle, at times even reverent. Often, with a view to bringing sparkle into *alapa*, he touches a *svara* with a little throbbing. Or, he may make it tarry as a fount of luminous feeling. It is this manner of lavishing love on detail which gave to his *rishabh* in the *taar* a far-away look, at some places, making it seem detached or *sannyastha*.

Above all, the *svara* in his *alapa* sometimes seems a halo of light that is not only to be noticed but lived from within. This evokes the image of *nada* as *sarvavyapi*, allows contemplation in the midst of creation and makes us *see* the meaning of the view that the singer’s best moments are those of a self-absorption in the constancy of a *svara*.<sup>12</sup>

Thus alone does the treatment of *svara* answer its definition as *swyameva rajate*, or as that which is not merely self-existent, but self-luminous. It is such a manifold and detailed treatment of a *svara* that purifies feeling, sharpens the intellect, and moves us beyond words.

Fineness, animation, sweep and sparkle — these were the four essential graces of his *alapa*. The suggestion of sweep was provided by the subtleties shown as *duran* and *muran*; of vigour by *hudak* and *sphoort*; of fineness in movement by *lahak* and *anunasika*; and of sparkle and resonance by *vedang* and *anuranatmaka* . . . Sometimes the last was used to work up a halo of woolly glow around *taar sa*.<sup>13</sup> . . . The articulation of *sargams* (or note-names) never seemed a mere arrangement

of inert points . . .; the *svaras* in fact, would seem to twinkle in a liquid radiance."

By this *alapa*, I clearly remember, Thakur Jaideo Singh<sup>14</sup> was moved into a very feeling compliment: 'This is, to be sure, music of the *Gandharvas*. Where is it ever to be had, Khan Sahib, in our mundane experience?'

### 3. Of depth and daintiness

A little more analysis may here be attempted. For, it was in *alapa* that Rahimuddin Khan revelled. It would, as a rule, be exceptionally sweet; and also seem *sattvik*, unlike common worded singing. The suggestion of depth was here worked up not directly by the quality of the voice — which seemed a little lacking in volume — nor even by curvital *passage* from one note to another, as has always distinguished the Dagar Brothers' singing; but by the steady, contemplative utterance of individual notes. The negative features here listed — along with a fuller employment of *diverse* formal graces like *dyut*, *vedang* and the *anuranatmaka* way — made his *alapa* seem unmistakably 'vocal', and utterly distinct from *alapa* on the *veena*. At quite a few places it would seem just daintily linear. Fineness, repose, a certain ethereality, and a woolly, regulated (*anuranatmaka*) glow, in addition to sweetness, were indeed the major effects of Rahimuddin Khan's *alapa*. *Depth was here manifest in the manner of a sigh, as a reflex of inwardness, not of physical bulk; and what led to the overall purity of effect, in the absence of words, was a daintiness of manner that spoke to the spirit, instead of titillating sense or amorous fancy.*

### 4. Aesthetic rarities

But I do not wish to underrate *alapa* of the *veena* way. For, I still have not forgotten the overwhelming effect of *such alapa as sung* by the maestro to me in the presence of his son and the late Ustad Sadiq Ali Khan, a recognized *veena* player. The occasion was an informal get-together at my residence.<sup>15</sup> Asad Ali, the instrumentalist's own son,<sup>16</sup> began playing *bheempalasi*; and something in the rendering so touched Rahimuddin Khan that he began *singing in the idiom of the instrument*. It was a lively, ceaseless flow, up-and-down, of the *raga* as disembodied, so to say, from its constituent *svaras* where the voice rarely tarried; and the impact was such — it seemed to pull our inner being out — that I soon found it unbearable, and had in fact to pray for its immediate closure. Ustad Sadiq Ali Khan, on the other hand, was literally in tears, averring that the singing was a cruel reminder of what the *Veena used to be*.

I may here also recall, for its relevance to aesthetics, what I wrote more than twenty years back.<sup>17</sup>

"I have seen Ustad Rahimuddin Khan Dagur delighting an audience

of university teachers with a delineation, through *alapa*, of the image of a flower opening up gently to the rays of the sun. In such cases the audience has, of course, to be notified in advance. But the interruption ... is more than set off by the completeness of delight which follows."

Here a *visual* effect is worked up through the medium of *sound*. So it is not imitation, but a clear case of what Mrs. Langer calls *transformation*: that is,

"the rendering of a desired appearance without any actual representation of it, by the production of an *equivalent* sense-impression, rather than a literally similar one, in terms of the limited, legitimate material which cannot naively copy the desired property of the model."<sup>18</sup>

The context also presses for a mention of some compositions which the maestro would often sing to me on request, but which he never presented, so far as I know, to regular audiences. My purpose is here to show how a *bandish* may be distinguished by its adroit employment of the principle of sound-sense harmony. I recall, to begin with, a (*gujari*) *todi dhruvapada*, set to *sool tala* :

कीन्हीं सकल सृष्टि इक दिन में,  
उन साहब करतारन

Here, the word *छिन* (in *sthayi*) would be sung in such a manner that it would not merely convey its meaning, but truly *seem* briefer than the merest point of time, and yet a clear accent of springiness. And a little later, in the same composition, the word *sapna*, suggesting the passing (not enticing) quality of what the world presents, would be so skilfully sung — by means of a निघमगरे *anudatta* glide which would seem to *fade in colour*, without getting *unmusical* — that evanescence itself would seem held up to view, and not merely meant by the word. To set it so pellucidly in song, in the sense of *transitoriness*, is a challenge to the composer.<sup>19</sup>

The working of the principle in question, I recall, would be *more clearly manifest* in Khan Sahib's *dhruvapadas* of *aradhana* which aim, in the main, at saturating the singer himself with devout feeling, and not at presenting music to an audience. Here, *upaj* or creative variations are forbidden. But the requirement in such cases, be it noted, is *adaptation of musical manner not to meanings of separate words, but to the basic feeling of the text*.

Many are the compositions that I here think of : 'आज आयो आनन्द' in *raga jogia asavari*; 'जय जय जग जननी देवी' in *durga*; 'तू ही है सुमिरन जोग मोरे दाता' in *kinkangika*; and that soul-elevating composition in *raga sivamat bhairava*, 'प्रथम उठ भोर' the manner of which would be so consist-

ently soft and serene and ennobling that the whole singing would seem a wafting of incense heavenwards.

### 5. Early training, influences

Singing of such quality is not a sudden success. It is always the harvest of a long discipline; and we may turn, for a while, to the sources that made Rahimuddin Khan what he was:

Born in 1901<sup>20</sup> at Udaipur where his father, Ustad Allabande Khan, was a state musician, Rahimuddin's exposure to music began at the early age of five, when the elders gave him leave to attend the practice sessions of other members of the family. Those were the days of the training of his brother, Nasiruddin Khan<sup>21</sup> — with whom, in later life, he often discussed music, and sometimes also sang — and Ziauddin Khan, son of Allahabande Khan's elder brother, Ustad Zakiruddin Khan, who too was employed in Udaipur at that time. The child was unusually mischievous; but when three years later he was 'enrolled' as a pupil, his father and uncle would both often wonder at the quickness of his grasp. He had to get up at three in the morning; and the day's *rayaz* would often outlast the set ten hours, many a time to the point of sickening. When his own stature as a singer had grown Rahimuddin Khan would often recall, with not a little gratitude, that he had never met musicians more particular about practice than his uncle and his father.

At the age of 15, however, Rahimuddin Khan had to leave Udaipur for Alwar, where his father took up a new appointment as a state musician. The six years that he here spent were punctuated with visits to Udaipur, so that his training with his uncle continued, if but fitfully.

This basic training, under both Allabande, Zakiruddin Khan,<sup>22</sup> continued for thirteen years. It took the following course :

Under *nada adhyaya* the pupil was taught not only the proper employment of the palate, lips, tongue and teeth in the production of musical voice, but much about *vadya*, *prakarana* and *tala*. Instruction relating to the first of these included many such *dhrupadas* as embody secrets of the technique of instrumental music. In the context of *prakarana*, Rahimuddin Khan learnt how and where to use *akara*, *ukara* and *ekara* with effect; and of course the various formal devices of *alapa*.<sup>23</sup> And the study of *tala adhyaya* made him familiar with the mysteries of *matra-prastara*. In addition, he was initiated into *dhrupadas* of various kinds. Some of these aim at worship (*aradhanat-maka*); others at the mastery of individual *svaras*, say, *rishabh* or *gandhar*; and still another class comprises those that are plainly *varnatmaka*, like the *multani* composition :

‘वंसीधर पिनाकधर गंगाधर मुकुटधर जटाधर’

All this training, however, was but preparatory. It did not directly relate to presentation. Instruction in singing for an audience began only now, that is, when the trainee had completed 21 years of age. The essence of this next step was attention to the wholeness of song. The pupil now learnt how to do justice to a *dhruvapada* from the different viewpoints of text, *swara*, *raga*, *tala* and *rasa*,<sup>24</sup> gaining also from the coaching of his brother and Ziauddin Khan. The last was the only one to emphasize rhythm. The learner therefore developed a penchant for *sur*.

I may add that by the age of 21 Rahimuddin Khan had also heard such masters of music as Alladia Khan (of Kolhapur), Fayyaz Khan (Agra) and Rajab Ali Khan of (Dewas). He liked specially the last of these. The *veena* playing of Musharraf Ali Khan also had a hand in shaping his music. But his own chosen goal was the music of his father, Allabande Khan.

Rahimuddin Khan's first public performance was given at Lucknow, in a music conference where he sang *raga malkaus*. Thereafter, partly with an eye on financial relief, he spent quite some time with Kunwar Jayanti Prasad of Atrauli, with occasional visits to Calcutta, Bombay, Varanasi and Allahabad, to sing in music conferences. Roughly two years after the death of his (more famous) elder brother in 1936, Rahimuddin gave a brilliant exposition, again at Lucknow, of the *malkaus dhamar*: 'Aj Khelat Hori, Krishna Murari' the notation of which was done by no less a person than the late Pandit Ratanjankar. But from 1933 to 1952 Khan Sahib had a very difficult period, darkened by quite a few deaths in the family, so that of his thirteen children only four are now alive, Fahimuddin being the only son.

## 6. Select recitals

I first met Ustad Rahimuddin Khan in 1952; and at my residence in 1953 he once sang so brilliantly in the presence of Ustad Chand Khan, his proteges Hilal Ahmad and Nasir Ahmad, and the *tabla* wizard, the late Ustad Habeebuddin Khan — who also provided 'accompaniment' on this occasion — that we all felt overwhelmed. Ustad Chand Khan admitted that the *alapa* was a kind of education for them all; and Habeebuddin Khan sighed that, whereas of other singers he thought he could emulate them with a little vocal practice, Rahimuddin Khan seemed unapproachable for ever.

In 1954 he gave two competent recitals in the Music Conference held on the occasion of the All India Khadi & Village Industries Exhibition. Later in the year, in a programme presented by me in the Old Convocation Hall of the University of Delhi — and attended by such masters as the late Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan, Sadiq Ali Khan and Habeebuddin Khan, all of whom also performed on the occasion — Khan Sahib astounded the then Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Sri Ananthasaynam Ayyangar, with his immaculate chanting of a *Sanskrit ashtapadi*.

It was, however, only in '55 that his art got the notice it deserved. I have here in mind his singing in the Music Festival organized (in March) by Bharatiya Kala Kendra, New Delhi, on the lawns of the Constitution Club. The fact that he was required to perform after the seductive *ghazals* of Mubarak Hussain (and party) did not ruffle him; and he opened with such a wondrous *alapa* in *raga hindol* that the *quawwal* himself, sitting next to me, literally gasped in wonder. I think it here needful to recall<sup>25</sup> what I wrote thereon in The Hindustan Times of March 30, partly with a view to explain how the number of *svaras* in a *raga* may influence the structural look of a *bandish* :

"A *hindol* of only four clear *svaras* (*sa, ga, ma, dha*) with the merest suggestion of *nishad* appears truly majestic. The very sparseness of the filling makes for a form of austere beauty, exactly as remote and lean columns make a vaulted roof appear awesome. This explains the grandeur of the *dhrupada*: '*naad Brahmo Ko adhar*'. In the *sohni bhajan* that followed, a far away *rishabh* (in the *taar*) which seemed thinning in its sweetness, suggesting some detachedness, moved even . . . Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (sitting in the audience) into open admiration."

In a retrospective review, The Tribune<sup>26</sup> highlighted an extra feature of the self-same recital :

"In respect of sheer majesty of execution and consistent sweetness, Rahimuddin Khan's singing is hard to equal. Elizabeth Zuppinger, who gave a piano performance at the National Sports Club last month, was admired for the skilful way in which she conjured up a suggestion of the tinkling of bells. Rahimuddin Khan was seen accomplishing the more difficult task of giving the same suggestion vocally, by articulating the *taar shadaj* in the *anuranatmaka* way. Here, in fact, we had the additional suggestion that the tinkling was now approaching, now receding, exactly like the one that is produced by the swinging temple-bells."

At Bombay, in the Haridas Sangeet Sammelan of 1956 Khan Sahib sang with such irresistibleness that the listeners clamoured for letting him continue as long as he wanted to. The clock on the stage, indicating given time, was taken away forthwith!

In every major recital, I must add, vocal accompaniment would, as a rule, be provided by the artiste's own son, Fahimuddin, — a sweet, steady singer; and the son's 'able assistance' was often picked for mention by critics, as in a write-up on the maestro's performance in the (Calcutta) All-India Music Conference of 1957.<sup>27</sup>

In the Radio Sangeet Sammelan of the same year, Khan Sahib sang



*darbari*. Commenting thereon the Statesman music critic spoke of the 'sense of space and repose' in the initial exposition. And The Times of India reacted as follows :

"Then came a sensitive highly tranquillising vocal recital — that of Ustad Rahim-ud-din Khan Dagar. His *raga* was *darbari kanhra*. The treatment of *alapa* was eloquent. Khan Sahib displayed an uncanny feeling for correct intonations particularly in his tender approaches to *gandhar* and *dhaivata*. He constructed a sound base on 'shadjā' upon which he laid the super-structure of a sombre edifice of melody.<sup>28</sup>

In the Hindustan Times<sup>29</sup> I wrote the following on this *darbari* :

"Two or three renderings of *gandhar* were immaculate. The note here appeared . . . an aesthetic gem. Moveless in being, it suggested oscillation, even like a prospect which both is and has— to be."

In 1958 Rahimuddin Khan gave his second 'national programme' from the All India Radio. Here, again, a 'critical' notice may be quoted<sup>30</sup> specially because it makes comments of value on the nature and need of *alapa*:

"The opening *alapa* in *raga malikaus* was . . . a passionate vindication of its aesthetic necessity. The warrant of *alapa* as a distinct form of singing is its ability to accommodate those formal excellences which textual singing can only blur, broaden or blight. Rahimuddin Khan's *alapa* used some of these with commendable effect: chiefly *lahak*, *meend*, *gamak*, *vedang*, *dyut* and *anuranatmaka*. It is excellences such as these which make *alapa* a perfect identity of form and content. The singing in question (I may add) rebutted the myth that the appeal of *alapa* is purely perceptual. *Alapa* is pure music, to be sure; but it is pure, not in the sense of having no ideal significance, but in that of being an indistinguishable fusion of content and form, of how it looks and what it suggests. True *alapa* visualizes not indirectly through the meaning of words — which it totally eschews — but directly through the breath of its being, even as a tear at once looks sad; or a shady nook, cool."

It would, however, be wrong to think that Rahimuddin Khan could cater only for classically trained listeners. At my own humble instance, he sang repeatedly to audiences of mostly students and teachers on the campus of Delhi University,<sup>31</sup> and always most effectively. The listeners, I distinctly remember, would feel very deeply touched and look visibly so; and such of them as knew classical music would marvel at the way Rahimuddin Khan would often quite transcend the best that we find in the region of this art. One of these recitals, presented in Vivekanand Hall of the School of Econo-

mics by the Delhi University Music Society in August '58, drew the following thoughtful comment :

"In respect of bringing out the inherent . . . richness of a single *svara* (or of a tiny luff of *svaras*), Rahimuddin Khan's *alapa* in *raga puriya* was remarkably effective. Whether in lingering rendering of a single note, or (in) a simple, unconstrained, descending *taan*, music here was always sweet and chaste. The aesthetic effects conjured up were at places bewildering because of the simple, apparently artless way in which they stole into us. Sparkle, yearning tenderness, piercing the *svara* at the very centre of its luminous halo, — these were some of the more important effects worked up."<sup>32</sup>

### 7. The swara once again

My own impression of this recital is that of a luminous *ni* (in the *madya*) which just seemed disembodied, a sweet omnipresence, a free and intense diffusion. In my twenty-five years of 'classical' listening I have not had a fuller feel of the power of a single *svara*. To speak of seeing infinity in a note or in the compass of some *matras* is one thing; to show it up in practice, quite another.

The master I speak of was indeed very mindful of the utterance of the single note. I am here reminded of a seminar organized by the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, New Delhi, on the occasion of their 1957 Vishnudigambar Jayanti. Participants included such scholars as Thakur Jaideo Singh, the late Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan and Principal S.N. Ratanjankar. When the talk turned to the *dhevat* of *raga lalit*, Rahimuddin Khan insisted on showing rather than merely naming it; and, quite without the aid of a *tanpura*, he sang it so many times as the mere disappearing accent of an *avaroha taan*, and with such immaculate sweetness that the subtle suggestion, instead of open singing of the note, won immediate applause even from lay listeners. Another such occasion that I am here reminded of is the Seminar organized, a few years later,<sup>33</sup> by the Music Faculty of Delhi University. The place was the hall of the Faculty of Arts. Here, the Ustad astounded and delighted everyone by analysing lines of a popular film song<sup>34</sup> and showing how their accents of melodic appeal have been consciously cultivated and built upon by *alapa* of the *dhrupada* kind, all in terms of actual singing, and once again without the help of any 'accompaniment'.

### 8. Two clear failures

But, though I have never seen him fail in a concert hall, it would be wrong to suppose that Rahimuddin Khan never disappointed listeners. Once, I clearly remember, I tried to get some of his select compositions recorded<sup>35</sup> with the financial assistance of a friend from Australia. The Ustad seemed

willing to help; and the arrangements, satisfactory. But the music he could coax out of himself was far below his best; and I regret I could never again make a similar effort.<sup>36</sup> On an earlier occasion, he fared even worse. The place was a friend's house to which some important people had been lured with the intent of raising some money for the Ustad. But though he tried repeatedly to sing, no attempt could last longer than a few minutes; and the 'recital' was over in less than half an hour. The artist apologised, regretting he just could not sing.<sup>37</sup>

As a performer, Rahimuddin Khan was not very widely known and admired. But those who have heard him with an open sensibility, or without being tied to the commonly available, will not easily admit that music could be better. His singing demanded a different orientation; and an eye, I may add, for subtler effect and imagery, as against speed, mere intricacy and bulk. I know of many listeners who are quite well conversant with our classical music and its greatest living exponents; and who, in moments of receptivity, have yet gasped in amazement at the music of Rahimuddin Khan, drawing closer to the place from where emanated such soulful radiance of sheer unhibited *svara*. Of course, as the stress of the experience wears off, our wonted ways return, like 'shades of the prison house', and our more frequent concern with the popular cuts off the memory of the experience as lived. If it is now at all thought of, it is merely as something that happened, quite without its power to quicken the spirit.

Did such a singer produce any *shagird*? None, I regret, except his own son. I know that for some years he was on the teaching staff of Marris College, Lucknow. But they say he hardly did any teaching there. His complaint, on the other hand, was that he got no one to teach. Be that as it may, one thing is patent. His talk on music would be as a rule quite full of insight, if not analytic. But this must be clarified.

## 9. Musical discourse

How do we distinguish today, the shades of the single *svara*? The answer is: as *shuddh-komal*, or *ati komal*, *andolit*. Is such talk, I ask, aesthetical enough? Is it adequate to the fabric of music, so rich and varied in imagery and effect? We must answer in the negative. Aesthetically, our talk about music is but infantile. This should be manifest as we turn to Rahimuddin Khan's manner of discoursing on music :

The (*komal*) *rishabh* of *puriya* is *lajjit* or coy, the meaning being that the note is to be sung not self-assertively, but as a mere gentle accent in a phrase<sup>38</sup> so as to work up the image of a dainty blushing droop. In a rendering of *hindol* the *gandhar* should be *prajjwalit*. That is, it should seem aflame. The *pancham* of *raga shri* is *kamalvat*; which means that, rising from the *rishabh* slimly as a stem, the voice should open up at *pa* in the *svarita*<sup>39</sup> manner, so

that the *pancham* may seem to bloom, like a lotus. The way we commonly speak of such things is, by contrast, quite prosaic: the *rishabh* in *puriya* is but a *zarra* (dot or particle); in *raga hindol*, *ga* is important; and in singing *raga shri*, one has to move from *rishab* to *pancham*.

I fail to see why we should stick to this latter kind of talk when in relation to the other arts we speak, quite freely, of colours as vibrant or recessive; of vaulted roofs and pillars that seem strained in holding beams aloft; and of phrases that clang or seem to caress.

The matter is so significant — relating, as it does to the very choice of taking a merely grammatical or truly aesthetical view of music-making — that I feel impelled to expatiate it

a. The notes in actual music *appear in a setting*.<sup>40</sup> So, the way we talk about it should square with how they *seem* and relate to the context. In other words, our viewpoint should be mainly *phenomenological*. At present, however, it is not at all so. Our books on music of course speak of *svaras* to be used in a *raga* — like bricks in building, as mere aggregation — though with inequal individual prominence. But they rarely link any effect<sup>41</sup> or image with their use. And though the concept of *samveda* is freely bandied, nothing is said as to how the notes thus related are to look like. The result is a chasm between our pedagogic talk about music and our actual experience of the art.

b. This gap can be bridged only by the kind of discourse I have emphasized, following Khan Sahib. Such talk, I may add, has classified musical utterance itself — as against *svaras* and their groupings — from the viewpoint of manner and effect. The master indeed often brought out in singing five of such *vakyas*: *shuddh mudra sadharana*, *tertik*, *vajravak*, *sampooran*, and *samkhra* (or *sankeerna*). To illustrate the first, a *bhairavi dhruvapada* — itself beginning with the words : '*shuddh mudra sadharana*' — would be sung. *Tertik*, I could see, means a tender, yearning manner of calling some one far away. *Vajravak* is the opposite manner: stiff, regal, egotistical. The former, Rahimuddin Khan would add, distinguished his father; and the latter, his uncle, Zakiruddin Khan. The lesson for theory here is that (what is grammatically) the same *svara* or *svara-samooha* may be sung in ways which are *identifiably different in respect of seeming*. To be sure, a note may appear to be whispered or thrust into silence. Unless these details are duly heeded, I ask, how is our concern with music *aesthetic*?

c. A more basic point may here be made. The Ustad would often insist that the *dhruvapada* word for cultivation of music is *sadhana*, not *rayaz* or practice. *Rayaz* aims at better presentation — to the outside world; *sadhana*, at entering into the mysteries of song, and at saturating oneself with attitudes that make for self-improvement, and ultimately for the crowning

goal of music: liberation. The latter may be seen in the light of following dhruvapada of *nad sadhana* in *raga bihag*:

सुर तत्त्व ज्ञान, जीवन मुक्ति को रूप साधे, तब पावे  
ज्ञान को मरम, मुनि जन सुनो प्रमान  
जीव चित्त फिरे, तब चित्त पावक में प्रवेश करे  
देह वायु को ले जाय, ब्रह्म ग्रन्थि करके समान

But, how does the idiom of our talk about music relate to the cultivation of *attitudes*, or, say, to orientation of being? I may here reproduce what I wrote long ago, as a mere summary of Khan Sahib's own comments that he would freely make while singing to his friends:

"Imagine a devotee hallowing the morning with *svaras* of the *bhairava* mode. Steadying himself with the basic *sa* (tonic), he sings to saturate himself with images and attitudes that suit the hour — the rising sun, yearning in prayer and chastening of self, pouring *arghya* (holy water) on the Deity, and non-attachment towards things of the world. A brief but sure touch at the tonic followed immediately by *komal rishabh* prolonged firmly and sweetly, at once blends the mind with the sunrise outside by suggesting effulgence, *the identification being helped by the fact that he has learnt to think of a 're' so sung as 'tejasi'*. The same note, *komal re*, touched while descending from *ga*, provides, in manner, a musical transcript of the downward slant of pouring *arghya* on the idol; and this quite acceptably because the singer has been trained to call this *rishabh* '*arghi*'. As attunement grows through the aid of the *svaras*, detachment deepens and the devotee cooperates by possessing the *sa* merely ideally and lingering repeatedly at the *re*, now softly, though sweetly — the note suggesting transcendence. The *re* thus becomes a symbol of devotion and elevation of the self."<sup>42</sup>

It is, in my view, important to note that aesthetic discourse relating to *alapa-dhruvapada* seeks not merely to seize musical details for thinking, but to *bestir the requisite attitudes*. And the forms themselves are not only species of singing, but a kind of way. The very basic text out of which the syllables of *alapa* are so freely chosen<sup>43</sup> seems to bear it out :

*Aum antaram tvam*  
*Taran tarani tvam ...*

## 10. Some concepts distinguished

It is important to realize that the terminology of *alapa-dhruvapada* shows discriminating concern with *all* aspects of music. Diverse identifiable

ways of vocal utterance — with a relative wholeness of extent — are called *vakyas*. These have already been referred to. What is yet to be stressed about them only is that they relate *to singing*. Obviously, there is no relevance of *shuddh mudra* or *vajravak* to instrumental music. The *vakyas* signify identifiable kinds of voice — production from the viewpoint of what it seems to be. Turning to both vocal and instrumental music, we have formal devices — in all twelve<sup>44</sup> — like *akara*, *ganak*, *lahak*, *dagar*, and *hudak*, on the one hand; and *jurat-phurat*, *laag-daant*, *teekh-chokh* and *sur sangat*, on the other.<sup>45</sup> Of the former not every one is usable in instrumental music, 'akara' being clearly irrelevant to, say, *veena*-playing. Again, in the region of vocal music itself, these niceties of manner are not all freely applicable; thus, *hudak* is said to be forbidden for a rendering of *raga lalit*. But they are surely not confined to singing, the use of (at least) *gamak* and *meend* being a common feature of our instrumental music. The latter — that is, *jurat-phurat*, etc. — are not so much objectively given devices to be *expressly cultivated* (like *gamak*, *lahak*, etc.,) as details of manner which *them selves accrue* to the singer (or the instrumentalist) as he progresses in the art. Thus, as he grows more skilled and confident, his music may come to show happier groupings of *svara* (*sur-sangat*) and some clear marks of assertiveness — say, *laag-daant*, *teekh-chokh*. *Vajravak*, on the other hand, is something to be practised; and it is of course restricted to singing.

I must admit, however, that all this is yet to be clearly understood. Earlier, I spoke of *vedanga* and *anuranatmaka*. But where do I place them here? The individual identification of these details of form — of their effect, in relation to the names they bear — is a fascinating subject of research; and I believe that, unless substantial work is done in this direction, our understanding of *raga* — as a form of vital feeling, rather than as a grouping of notes by which a *rasa* can be somehow worked up or conveyed — will remain very imperfect.

#### 11. A singular detail: nasality

I may add that formal graces like *vedang* and *dyut* aim at seizing infinitesimal buoyancy and sparkle of *svaras*; and that the *alapiya's* voice-culture distinguishes even the kinds or degrees of *nasality*. The second point may be clarified a little, by inviting attention to a (*gujri*) *todi dhruvapad* which the Ustad would sing with obvious relish. Its cycle is *teora*; and its text, as follows :

कटत विकार नामोच्चार, रे मन सुमरिये ओंकार  
मन जीतो, तो सब संसार; विद्या सार, धर्म अघार  
राखो लाज, हे करतार  
कटत.....

Here, in the *antara*, the word *sansara* moves up from *ma* towards the *taar sa*,

but the required nasal effect is produced — and the manner seems to have a filling — only if it is pronounced not as *sansara*, but as *sanisara*. Today, on the other hand, what is hailed is singing which is robust and fluent;<sup>46</sup> and we are just not made to look for finenesses like the one I have brought out.

## 12. Of compositions and ragas

Some other favourite compositions of Khan Sahib here come to the mind, because of their religious and philosophical significance :

- a. उदात्त अनुदात्त स्वरित  
वेदन को मूल मंत्र... (पूरिया)
- b. गंगे सरल बहो  
घट ही में गंगा, घट ही में गंगा  
भटकत कोह फिरे... (सूरदासी मल्हार)
- c. भजरे मन विश्वनाथ (केदारा)  
जैसे मन आवे

The *nayaks* to whom Rahimuddin Khan freely attributed the *dhruva-padas* that he sang are: Baiju, Gopal, Dhondu and Bakshu. As for *ragas*, I remember that he once sang *abhuta kalyan* and *baageshwari kanhra* in the 'national programme' of the A.I.R. But the melodies I have heard from him most effectively and in detail are (*gurjari*)<sup>47</sup> *todi*, *lalit*, *hindol*, *bheem palasi*, *shree*, *puriya*, *mian ki malhar*, *malkaus*, *kedara*, *darbari* and *sohni*. He would include *bihag*, *kaamboji*, *desi* and *shankara* in his list of *ragas* preferred; but I have never had the privilege of hearing him render them at length.

Did he think even we could today *try* to create compositions in emulation of the ones that he revelled in? There was a time, I remember, when he would dismiss the possibility most emphatically. Once he in fact seemed angered by my insistence that, after all, even the best of our composers could not be said to have exhausted the possibilities of creation. Later, however, I could see him mellow a little in this matter; and when, on the occasion of the seminar on Science and Music,<sup>48</sup> I presented a *dhruvapada*, a *dhamar* and some *taranas*<sup>49</sup> he seemed happy and excited. I remember his comment that, though they all seemed tinged<sup>50</sup> with the manner of his compositions, the rules had been duly kept; and that the (relative) newness achieved was therefore admissible, and in one case remarkable.<sup>51</sup>

And I shall never forget the way he would beam whenever he saw Rani Karna dancing *dhruvapadas* and *dhamars*. He freely complimented her on this quite proper enrichment of the range of Kathak, this needful addition to its content of dignity.

### 13. The man and his career

I think it here needful to add that it was never easy to win his approval in respect of things which he did not already like. What he all along cherished was singing to his friends, talking on music, rich tasty food and his daily five prayers. Only in respect of one of these did I sometimes have to bend his will; and that was food. In spite of his quite robust constitution, he sometimes suffered from piles, diabetes and tremor of the heart; but on such days, though he would do what I wanted him to — that is, take simple food, biochemic remedies or a brief walk — he would, while eating what I offered, look pathetically glum. Once, when I had for a little while extolled the virtues of boiled, vegetarian food, he angrily protested that he was not born to become a wash-cloth, like me, to be hung on a string.

He was indeed, in many matters, headstrong. At the same time, one could not help acknowledging his keen sense of self-respect. Once he spurned the offer of a job, when (I know) he needed it most, just because the 'patron' who made the offer had, a few days earlier, branded 'the whole tribe' of musicians as being 'undependable'. Acharya K.C.D. Brihaspati and I have been two of his best friends; but both of us know how eloquent could his anger be. Yet, on the other hand, he was deeply responsive to sheer human love and concern; and my most moving image of the man is his seeming quite honoured, and delighted like a child when once with my family I visited his residence.

Rahimuddin Khan was indeed a simple man at heart. And the honours he got did nothing to change him. Yet, these were many and exalted: Akademi Award for Hindustani Music in '64; *Sangit Ratnakar* from Bharat Dharma Maha Mandal Dharma Sabha, Varanasi; *Sangit Martand* from Lalit Kala Akademi, Kanpur; an honorary doctorate in music from Sur Singar Samsad, Bombay; and, above all, the coveted *Padma Bhushan*.<sup>52</sup>

This, however, was hardly the kind of attention he needed, though he richly deserved it all. His finances were generally so bad that even a hand to mouth manner seemed to satisfy him. The last thing he did with my help was to fill an 'application for financial assistance' from the Department of Culture (Government of India) under the 'reactivated' 1961 scheme for help to distinguished artists. And he was visibly relieved when he saw that he could apply; for, as per conditions, his monthly income did not exceed the sum of two hundred and fifty rupees, — his Radio fee for one day's singing!

His closing days, however, were by no means forlorn. At Jaipur, where he suffered his first heart attack in January '75, the doctors and Saiduddin, his son-in-law, did all that they could. When after the summer he had shifted to Delhi, he would often gratefully mention it. Here, he was scheduled to sing, for the last time in his life, on November 9 in the Tansen Festival.<sup>53</sup> But the strain of sitting through Ustad Bismillah Khan's recital on November



7 quite incapacitated him. He now looked exhausted and in distress; and had therefore to be hospitalized. Here,<sup>54</sup> intensive medical care, the presence of his son and the soliticious visits of Dagar Brothers, Asad Ali, Smt. Saira and other friends seemed to enliven him for a while. But, he passed away on Nov. 20 a little after midday. His last wish was to offer *namaz*. It was, in fact, during the usual ablutions that he sank in the lap of his son.

Rahimuddin Khan Dagur was not just one vocalist, but a link with our hoary past. And if we care for our heritage, we have somehow to reconstruct his kind of music by turning to those who are wedded to it: his son, Fahimuddin Khan, and his nephews, the well-known Dagar Brothers, Nasir Zahiruddin and Nasir Fayazzuddin.

#### NOTES

1. 'A' here stands for 'Allabande', the first name of Rahimuddin Khan's father. He would insist also on the present spelling of his surname. It is not 'Dagar' or 'Daggar', but 'Dagur'. But, except in the context, of his name, I have throughout spelt the word as 'Dagar', because of the practice of most members of this illustrious family.
2. I must here add : without the aid of words.
3. *Tala* or beat-measured (cyclic) rhythm is a feature of *dhrupada*.
4. *Laya*, as musical duration subjectively regulated with an eye on effect and without the aid of beats, characterizes *alapa*.
5. R. Fahimuddin Dagur teaches *alapa-dhrupada* at Rabindra Bharati, Calcutta.
6. Nasir Zahiruddin Dagar and Nasir Fayazzuddin Dagar. The *older* pair of Dagar Brothers, which made 'alapa-dhrupada' known even beyond the country's frontiers, comprised (the late) Ustad Nasir Moinuddin and Ustad Aminuddin Dagar; it does not function now.
7. The parallel drawn is no mere patching. According to our ancient viewpoint, the real aim of music is liberation; and I have heard from the master under review a 'dialogic' composition in which the query, what is the locus of Brahman, is answered by saying : 'रस में समये ब्रह्म'
8. Though all the notes are not required to be sung for equal length of time.
9. The reference here is to the Sunday morning session.
10. My italics.
11. This is but the English version of a favourite utterance of the Ustad himself : 'सुर ऐसी नाजूक चीज़ है कि अलफाज़ का बोझ नहीं बरदाश्त कर सकता'
12. This is again a translation of another pet phrase of Khan Sahib : 'अबल सुर में लीन होत'
13. This, the artist assured me, was a distinguishing feature of the singing of his father, Ustad Allabande Khan.
14. One of our best musicologists today.
15. In the winter of '54-'55.
16. And now on the staff of the Faculty of Music, University of Delhi.
17. In the Independence Day Supplement of The Hindustan Times, on 15.8.'55. The extract is from my article : *Our Classical Music*.
18. S.K. Langer : *Problems of Art*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1957, p. 98.
19. I must here add that the song in question was *not a creation* of Khan Sahib. But he could certainly sing it very well.
20. I here go by an entry in the diary of the artist's father which is in the possession of his son, Fahimuddin Khan.

21. Father of the well-known Dagar Brothers. Rahimuddin Khan's other brothers were : Imamuddin Khan and Hussainuddin, better known as Tansen Pandey.
22. The two brothers were known as such, as a couple; for they would sing as a pair, the stately, *rajasic* manner of Zakiruddin Khan supplementing as a foil the soft and *sattvic* singing of Allabande Khan.
23. These, except *gamak*, have been referred to earlier.
24. Fahimuddin, Khan Sahib's son, has duly undergone the entire course of this training; he can illustrate, in terms of actual singing, almost all that I have said in this article.
25. Again, with some alterations.
26. Of Ambala, dated April 24.
27. The reference here is to The Statesman, Calcutta, of 3.11.'57.
28. The times of India, Delhi : 21.10.'57.
29. Of the same date.
30. From The Hindustan Times of 28.4.'58. The artist's first 'national programme' was broadcast on 8.3.'55.
31. In: Hindu, Ramjas Colleges; Miranda House; Faculty of Arts; Gwyer Hall; and Delhi School of Economics.
32. The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 24.8.'58.
33. In 1966, from March 14 to 17, to be precise.
34. From the film 'Nagin'.
35. Somewhere in Defence Colony, not very far from Nizamuddin West, where Khan Sahib lived for quite a few years.
36. I may here add that good recording of his music has been luckily done by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi; National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay; and by Mr. Laxmi Lal Pitti, a businessman of Bombay.
37. The reason of these failures, I now realize, was partly the absence of his son, his regular 'accompanist', on either occasion.
38. Say, *फिरें फिरें*
39. As distinguished from *udatta-anudatta* (or *arohaavaroha*). *Svarita*, according to Rahimuddin Khan, is that manner of rendering which 'shows' the *svara* as waxing and waning without really moving from its location in the scale.
40. The setting may well be a mere instant of quiet.
41. Effect, not *rasa*
42. My article : *Essentials of Hindustani Music*, in Diogene 45, Paris. January-March, 1964, 20-1.
43. I do not, however, understand the details of this relation.
44. These are: *akara, gamak, lahak, dagar, duran, muran, kampita, andol, sphoort, hudak, soot, meend*.
45. Here, the full list is as follows : *saj-sahita, ghansugharh, jurat-phurat, laag-daant, teekh-chokh, sursangat*.
46. The Hindustani words here are : तपड़ा, तय्यार
47. I bracket this word with a purpose. What we today regard as *gurjari todi* was simple *todi* to Rahimuddin Khan.
48. Organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, from March 27 to 30, 1970.
49. All of which had been sung to, and checked by him before presentation.
50. Barring the *taranas*.
51. This refers to the *amad* of the dhamar: *khelat hori Shyam chapal madmati*
52. To this may be added the fact that Rahimuddin Khan always elicited great respect from : vocalists like Ustads Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Ameer Khan, and the *Sitar* wizard, Ustad Vilayat Khan.
53. Organized every year by Mr. M.P. Sheshadri of National Cultural Organization.
54. That is, in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi.