

DISC REVIEW

Pioneers of the Kirana School

It is sheer good luck that Abdul Karim Khan and Abdul Waheed Khan were saved from oblivion by the gramophone companies. Even in Western music, the fact that Liszt was a great pianist or Paganini a great violinist are not verifiable propositions. But the genius of Abdul Karim Khan, who died in 1937, can be seen from about 40 five-minute recordings that he has left.

On the other hand, Waheed Khan has been preserved by the archives of All India Radio. Recently AIR, in collaboration with HMV, have brought out a disc (ECLP 2541) of three ragas rendered by the maestro whom the new generation could not hear so far. In the best Kirana tradition, Waheed Khan gives greater importance to melody than to rhythm. In all the three ragas, rhythm is always subdued by the sheer grandeur of melody. All the slow compositions are set to Jhoomra tala of 14 beats. After arriving at the climactic point, there is the silence of six subdivisions, and this creates an exhilarating effect.

Waheed Khan's rendering of Patdeep is outstanding. This raga seems to have inspired all Kirana singers. The renderings of Patdeep by Abdul Karim Khan and Hirabai Barodekar are equally superb. The addition of a sharp *nishada* to Bhimpalasi gives Patdeep a haunting touch. Waheed Khan's brilliant phrases in this raga are an unforgettable experience. His Patdeep and Multani figure on the same side of the die, but because of the brilliance of his phrasing, the Patdeep is more absorbing.

As a pioneer of the Kirana School, Waheed Khan shares with Abdul Karim Khan his intuitive perception of melody. Both the masters have soft, sweet, and

high-pitched voices. Both can meditate over notes brilliantly. In two subsequent generations, these norms have been preserved by Sawai Gandharva and Bhimsen Joshi.

It is difficult to form a true picture of Waheed Khan's genius from one LP. In this record, Patdeep is the only raga which gives a glimpse of the genius of the old master. But Waheed Khan's rendering of Darbari shows his fatal flaw. Occasionally he overdid his elaboration of a raga. Even his distinguished disciple, Pandit Jeewan Lal Mattoo, thought that on certain occasions Waheed Khan's *badhat* (elaboration) tended to be tedious and tiring.

Waheed Khan's rendering of Darbari shows that his sense of discrimination failed him on certain occasions. In a particular raga, there are many permutations and combinations possible, but not all are worth performing in a recital. Some permutations are good for practice, while others are good for performance. One needs the sense of a composer to sift the performable patterns from those which are good only for practice. Waheed Khan very often failed to draw the line here.

If Abdul Karim Khan was the melodic genius of the Kirana *gharana*, Waheed Khan was its mathematical genius. While the former was the quintessence of melody, the musical patterns of the latter, occasionally, had no lyrical value. In certain cases, Waheed Khan gave the impression that one may do the whole Merukhand and still remain a mediocre musician. This defect has remained in some singers of the Kirana school as a result of the influence of Waheed Khan.

But the great achievement of Waheed Khan is that he laid down a definite basis for the development of a raga. He believed that the moment you touch the next higher note, an entirely new gestalt is formed in relation to the earlier notes. In this respect, even

Amir Khan was influenced by the old master. It is often believed that the pioneer of the Indore school was a self-taught musician. What is not seen is that Amir Khan borrowed his *vilambit* style of singing from Wahid Khan and his *drut* style from Aman Ali Khan. It is because of Waheed Khan's influence that he often took an hour to reach the *gandhara* of the middle octave of Darbari.

Compared to all this, Abdul Karim Khan is an ocean of melody. His third LP retains the glory and freshness of his earlier records. Some of the melodic phrases in Darbari and Gujarati Todi have memorable appeal. His rendering of Abhogi is so inspiring that no

subsequent singer of this Carnatic *raga* has been able to escape his influence. His latest LP also contains a brilliant *tarana* in Marwa. In this rendering, he is the true voice of feeling. For this reason, even those who belong to other *gharanas* find his appeal irresistible. M.R. Gautam belongs to the Agra *gharana*, but in his LP of Ramkali and Shuddha Kalyan, he acknowledges the influence of the old master. The latest LP only reminds us that Abdul Karim Khan was among those rare artistes of our century who sang with their soul.

CHETAN KARNANI