

'There is too much noise'

At 93, one of the leading classical vocalists this century, he died last month ignored and unsung. He gave Rajiv Vora a final interview a few days before he passed away.

ON THE EVENING of November 8, Pandit Dilipchandra Vedi's 93-year-long journey through the world of music came to a finale. Slightly before 6 a.m. he was struck down with cerebral thrombosis. I was his last visitor, and one who had never met him before, nor heard nor seen him.

I had wanted to meet him for some time and pick his brain about the contemporary music scene. The meeting was to be a kind of tribute to one of the leading lights of classical music this century, a tribute to a virtuoso who made a virtue of hiding from the limelight. At 93, his tutelage was selective, his students handpicked, his reference difficult to get.

The Sangeet Natak Akademi had done its bounden duty by handing him an award a couple of years ago and then consigning him to its dusty archives. The government cursorily offered him accommodation, which the Vedis politely declined. Dilipchandra Vedi and his wife lived a spartan life; they had no medical facilities, no help apart from neighbours who made it a point to bail them out occasionally. They had no telephone, no contact with the culturally powerful. Their only ongoing connection with the government's cultural conscience was the Rs 1,000 per month that came their way by way of pension.

The Vedis lived for half a century in a one-room unkempt, dilapidated house which was propped up, it seems, only by the good wishes of their neighbours. That helped to keep them going, but death came without any solace. Vedi's wife, in her '80s, graciously said that they had minimal financial difficulties, that ITC and the Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad had pooled in from time to time.

But, talking to the man, it was evident that there was one forum where he was regarded as a living reference: the Rotterdam Music Conservatorium in the Netherlands, one of the biggest and leading music establishments in Europe.

The head of the Conservatorium's World Music section, Prof Joep Bor, and musicologist Prof Wim van der Meer, were fully aware of Vedi's importance in the scheme of things.

Almost all of Vedi's memory was full of his heydays, the 1930s and '40s. Here are excerpts from his last interview:

What dominates in music today?

Noise. There is too much of noise all around. There is a lot of activity in music, and a lot by way of its propagation, as people say. Every musician is like a shopkeeper of his own music. But much of it is artificial and not genuine. Only those selling artificial stuff make noise, those selling gold do not.

How has artificiality crept into what

It is true that unemployment has also made musicians out of ordinary people. Then they cultivate the press and depend upon it to spread the word. They know no rules of music.

What is the place of rules and regulations where talent is concerned, the samskara? We have had some great names who sang outside rules and regulations.

It is in childhood that samskaras



Dilipchandra Vedi: music virtuoso who stayed away from the limelight

is otherwise known to be a pure form of music?

By copying big musicians. What's more, those who copy do not even care to seek permission from those whom they copy. These people are hungry only for publicity and not for music. In order to acquire name and fame quickly they do not even bother whether they are appreciated by knowledgeable people and musicians or by ignorants.

are formed and identified. It needs their cultivation. But who could cultivate them? Only those whose samskaras are already formed and properly cultivated. What can a musician who himself does not follow rules teach?

Rules-kayadas are necessary for a strong foundation. And the foundation is always built in the beginning, not at the end. It is matter of first following the rules and then forming a path.

But this so-called propagation of music, which has assumed the dimension of propaganda and noise, is partly responsible for the decline in the adherence to rules. This propagation is overdone, unnecessary. Those who do not know the rules and various moves of wrestling are today found to be challenging proven wrestlers.

What shape is the decline taking?

First comes artificiality and superficiality. Giravat ke pahahe banavat aati hai. People try to show what they are not. There is not much thought in today's music.

Music is a fine art. The fine arts require fine brains, what we call nature's gift. When you are naturally gifted, you will follow your path happily.

The test of a fine brain is that such a person appreciates and shows humility towards the fineness of others. There is no place for arrogance. But history testifies to the fact that there is always a dearth of fine brains.

Can anyone cure this malaise?

You slap them and some will disappear. They persist because there are no people to remind them of the tough standards. But some are cured purely through knowledge, jnana.

What do you think of Pandit Bhatkande (one of Dilipchandra Vedi's compatriots and supposed to possess vast knowledge, but bookish).

There was an all-India music conference in Varanasi in 1934. There Omkarnathji challenged S.N. Ratanjarker. Omkarnathji made some adverse remark about Bhatkandeji's shastra. He said that if a person like him failed to see anything in books and couldn't understand a thing, for whom had Bhatkandeji written them? S.N. Ratanjarker was irked, but what could he say? After all, Bhatkandeji had no practical knowledge of music and music is a practical art.

What is the point in claiming to be knowledgeable about music if you cannot sing even a note properly. *Andhere me rath chalanese kya matlab?* (What's the use of driving a chariot in the dark?) He was a pandit in theory. But to be a true Pandit in the field of music, one must also know the practice.

Bhatkandeji was half-baked. He was learned and scholarly. He also knew music. But his knowledge had no foundation; it was lame. He did not know the true forms of ragas. Vishnu Digambar (Paluskar) knew theory very well.....

At this point, words failed. Vedi—literally. I later came to know that he had been struck with paralysis. So much knowledge and wisdom was lost, all because no one had cared to talk to him at length. He died quietly on November 13.