

## MUSIC

## Colours of life

**Anjana Rajan**

NEW DELHI, MARCH 05, 2014 20:58 IST

UPDATED: MAY 19, 2016 06:27 IST

**Pandit Nirmalya Dey tells Anjana Rajan why there should be government sponsored gurukuls for Dhrupad**

Dhrupad is considered a niche art, which a few centuries ago gave way to Khayal in the popularity stakes. Today, with Khayal too considered niche, along with all the other Indian performance arts coming under the umbrella 'classical', where would Dhrupad stand? According to noted practitioner and teacher Pandit Nirmalya Dey, however, Dhrupad is both modern and rich and has a range of emotional contexts beyond the devotional. It needs to be properly propagated. By that he doesn't mean specialised Dhrupad festivals either. "I dislike that. It should be presented along with other genres so that a greater number of people can have access to it," says Dey.

It has been a busy winter for the renowned vocalist. Besides his regular concerts, he now prepares to see one of his disciples, Mamta Tripathi, open just the kind of festival he approves of. Starting this Friday, 7 p.m. at the India Habitat Centre, the festival also features Hindustani flute by John Woubbenhorst, and on the next day, Dhrupad vocal by Marianne Svasek and Celine Wadier – disciples of Dey's guru, Zia Fariduddin Dagar – followed by surbahar by Pushparaj Koshti.

Dey's masterclasses attempt to stem what he feels is the shortfall in good training practises. His own education, by his description, required him to lose himself to find the artist. Joining his ustad at 27 after 10 years of singing Dhrupad professionally, he was asked to start from scratch – “a big zero”. As a shishya, “Many times it happened that I didn't know even the name or the scale of the raga, and I just followed him for one-and-a-half hours, and when I came down from the stage I realised what I did,” he recalls. “You have to follow your master blindly. That is the real aptitude one must have for learning music.”

Yet, the guru also said, “Don't follow me at all.” It's a fine balance, agrees Dey. “Once you do that you are at the right stage of artistry...completely free. You don't have to follow your master or complete the same sentences he creates. And then you can enjoy the art.” That's why all of his guru's students have their own identity.

Dey points out, “At least the prominent cities must have the infrastructure where a student can learn this rare art in a gurukul process.” He says government involvement provides proper control, evaluation and transparency. Also, “For example there are so many scholars interested to come to India to learn, and they don't want to go through the process of ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) – because it is cumbersome, and if you tell them I want to learn from a guru, they will never register you.” The student is obliged to register with an institution or a university, he says. “But in the name of a guru there is no scholarship.”

So if the State Akademis were to run Dhrupad gurukuls, students could be trained on the pattern established by Zia Fariuddin Dagar, who taught at the Dhrupad Kendra established by the Madhya Pradesh Government's Allauddin Khan Music Academy and produced

outstanding artists. Four boys and four girls per batch were taken, says Dey, as government scholars for four years. “There was no curriculum, no number of ragas prescribed.” His motive was to equip them to perform in four years, after which most continued a lifelong journey. The MP government’s two continuing gurukuls – in Bhopal and Gwalior – should be replicated in other former centres of the art, he enumerates: Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar and Delhi.

Such gurukuls would increase employment too. Khayal may be crowded with practitioners, but here is a classical form where competition is scarce. “There is a shortage of good Dhrupad singers and instrumentalists, and if somebody comes up with good artistry, he or she can be established very quickly.”

### **Demystifying Dhrupad**

“Dhrupad encompasses all kinds of philosophy. It is not only devotional music. Many people put it forward as devotional music or that it came from the Sama Veda. I don’t believe these things. Dhrupad is a medieval form. It started in the medieval age which was significant culturally all around the world. In 15th century Dhrupad came into practice, took a definite shape of presentation.

Raja Mansingh Tomar of Gwalior was the person who first patronised Dhrupad. He has compiled a book called *Sahasrarasa*, a collection of the compositions of Nayaka Baksu. He was the first patron, and then slowly Dhrupad spread all over and went up to Mysore also. It encompasses all the aesthetics of life. All the nine rasas are there.”

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Printable version | Sep 13, 2019 4:16:16 AM | <https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/music/colours-of-life/article5753855.ece>

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