



Shakuntala Bharne

an Indian Classical Vocalist
par extraordinaire

-Basil Sylvester Pinto

A golden voice synonymous to AIR, Panaji for the last 18 years, and the host on popular shows, *Goenche Lahren* and *Hello Chitraranjan*, not many know Shakuntala Bharne is an accomplished Indian Classical Vocalist who has earned accolades across the country for her musically-endowed gift. She has also enthralled audiences with a variety of light music like *Bhakti Sangeet*, *Natyageet*, *Konkani Geet* and Classical-based Hindi Filmy songs and *Ghazals*.

She is also approved artiste of Marathi and Konkani drama for All India Radio, an approved artiste of All India Radio and Doordarshan for Indian Classical and Light Music Vocal.

This writer not just got a taste of her hospitality when he visited her residence at St. Inez a few weeks ago, but also had his curiosity about Indian Classical Music quenched. Following are the excerpts of the chat:

On your childhood/ musical background

--- I did not have any musical background really, but my mother had a deep interest in Devotional Music. As a very young child, she used to teach us in the evenings what is known as *uzalni*. She used to teach us alphabets, basic *shlokas*, etc. which was compulsory and a regular affair in front of the deity.

Once in a fortnight, a Sanskrit expert used to come to teach us the Classical Language right from the vocabulary and pronunciation of the words to *shlokas*. Thus I feel, that the throw of words, and the clarity of words came to me from childhood.

Taking up music

--- At the age of eight, I started learning music. I attended the Music School by *Swaramanch*, Margao and with guidance of Ramrao Naik, I began to study Indian Classical Music.

As a student

--- During my school, college days I participated in singing competitions. Not only in music, but I had other interests as well. I used to act in dramas, give speeches, recite poems, write articles, and even play sport. I was keen in sports like Hockey, Kabaddi, Discuss Throw and Running. In fact, while in college, I represented the institution in Volleyball and Hockey. I had the distinction of being the best all-rounder of the year as a student of Damodar College of Commerce & Economics, Margao.

After graduation

--- I felt music was my subject, after having a taste of varied fields as literature, drama and sports. As a matter of fact, I even tried to

further my studies in Journalism. In college, I had studied Business Communication and Mass Communication. Media was my first interest, but since music in itself is a part of media, and I like to have a conversation with the public, I realized music was my calling. I thus took up to study music further, and did my *Visharad* (BA Level in music) and *Sangeet Alankar* (MA Level in music).

Inching towards her dream

--- After doing all this, I got the opportunity to interview maestros of Indian Classical Music as Goa's very own, Kishori Amonkar, Ustad Zakir Hussain, Pt. Shivkumar Sharma, Pt. Jitender Abhisheki, etc. But I was not satisfied with my progress and felt restless. I sensed I had to do something for music and since there was no scope in the State back then, needed to go out. I took up the challenge, and with the opportunity to go to Hubli and be under the tutelage of *Kirana Gharana Padmavibhushan* Dr. Gangubhai Hangal, I grabbed it with both hands. But to meet her was not that easy, as she was a renowned vocalist, a towering figure of the industry. It all happened through SPIC MACAY, when one member told me that one student is taken on vacation to study Indian Classical Music under a maestro. It was Prof. Kamat, Prof. More of Chowgule College

who told me I could apply. I sent an application, but nothing worked out. That year, Dr. Hangal, was not taking in any student. But to my good fortune, I met up with *Chote* Rehmat Khan, who shared a very healthy relationship with Dr. Hangal. He promised me that he will take my case, and told me that I will have to sing to her to give her a good account of my talent. I readily consented. But now the problem arose where I would stay. It was Pundalik Naik, Hema Naik, Uday Bhembre and the Late Chandrakant Keni who helped me a lot in this regard. This was somewhere in 1988-89. My parents too, were not ready to send me out of Goa as a girl. But it was these people who helped me in making my parents understand.

Living a dream

--- And that was how I went to Hubli and became a disciple of Dr. Gangubhai Hangal. I was like her family member; almost the whole day was spent with her at her place. I consider myself, among all her disciples as the special one. Besides my music studies, she also ingrained in me the knowledge about the *Gharanas* of music, spoke about the various artistes, and related her personal experiences in the field.



Shakuntala with her Guru Dr. Gangubhai Hangal

Back in Goa and the special bonding continues

--- After spending 3-4 years with my Guru, I returned back to Goa, and in May 1991 joined AIR as an announcer while I continued with Indian Classical Music. All the while, I remained in touch with her until her death (July 21, 2009). I used to go to Hubli every year on the *Guru Poornima* day to pay my respect to her in the traditional style known as *Padya Pooja*. I still remember her to this day, and have a deep wish to start on her biography.

What music means to her

--- Music is the language of one's own culture. I feel that if you want to preserve your culture, the first thing you should know is the music of your land which is unique. It is not difficult to learn other cultures through music. Musical notes are the same everywhere. Goans, I feel should sing the music of their land and do deep study in that regard. Goa has an important place on the world map and we should make all attempts to make our music universal.

On her music and the audience

--- It is 100 % *manoranjan*. When we sing, listeners experience a change in life. When people approach me to compliment, I get the satisfaction, that I got a change in the people in that particular moment. It is not just the notes, but getting the audience involved along with feelings and sentiments is how I reach out to the people. The approach of an artiste should be sincere and sensitive, and when the audience accepts you, you get an identity as an artiste.

On her notable concerts and performances

--- I have performed with an artiste from Karnataka, Shri Krishna, with whom I plan to do a *jugalbandi* again in Goa. I have recently performed for the *Girijathai Kelekar Sangeet Sammelan*, Farmagudi (also earlier,

in 1993, 2002), and earlier at *Samrat Sangeet Sammelan*, Kavlem and Kesarbhai Kerkar, *Kala Academy*.

Places she has performed at outside Goa

--- Outside Goa, I have performed in Mumbai, Pune, Sangli, Kolhapur, Solapur, Akkalkot, Miraj, Hubli, Gadag, Mangalore, Bangalore, Chitradurga, Haggaud, Ankola, Udipi, Calicut, Trivandrum, Kochi, Trichur, Guruvayur, etc.

On her published books

--- *Swaranand*: A first Konkani book on music which includes introduction to the Indian Classical Music, and other important aspects (1995) and *Nadbrahm*: A compact and informative Konkani book on Indian Classical Music published by Goa Konkani Akademi (2006) which has won two State-level Awards Konkani *Bhasha Mandal Puraskar* and Goa Konkani Akademi *Puraskar*.

Apart from these books, my poems have been included in a book *Aprup* which is a compilation of poems of ten poetesses. Some of my poems have appeared on Konkani textbooks.

On her CD

--- *Gof* (garland) is a compilation of ten different songs in Konkani, of which she has composed about six.

On her future plans

--- I want to do much more in Konkani music. I want to prove to the people that there is a unique style in Goa, in their music. In Indian Classical Music, I want to take 100 % responsibility of Dr. Gangubhai Hangal's style of music. I want to take *Kirana Gharana* music to some level. I have started work on the biography of Goan vocalist, Prabhakar Karekar, renowned in India, which I eventually want to release.

