

## Revolving around Swara

Translated by Aashay Gune (2017)

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*Sakhi mukhchandrachhabi*

*Jabahi Nihari*

*Tan Man Dhan*

*Sab Gulgumai*

As I write in my room, I hear the notes of Raag Khambavati charm the evening. In the other room, my brother Milind is discussing work with James, his British Boss, who suddenly exclaims, “Ohh, is he singing?” “Yes, it’s his *riyaaz*”, replies Milind. “Feeling so good, Milind! Let me listen a little more”, he pleads. The musical note that mesmerised James, who developed a longing for it despite sitting at the other end of the world was Pt. Mukul Shivputra’s! For he is the *Gandharva* whose music fascinates and mesmerises everyone across caste, creed, religion, region, language and all such categories which appear mundane and redundant! His *Sur* – a pure, sacrosanct musical note by itself isn’t bound to any words or prose; yet his method of selecting the compositions resembles the way a jeweller would choose the best gem out of many precious stones.

I do not exaggerate a bit when I say that all that he does is unique! When we read his prose and poetry in Sanskrit, Marathi or Hindi, we realise that God has conferred so much on him. While many writers find it challenging to maintain their expertise in more than one language, he has not only mastered three languages but has also added poetry to this expertise. In fact, in the world of music, Pt Mukul Shivputra is the only one who can compose a poem in Sanskrit. His hands sing when he creates a beautiful sculpture, whereas, in a music concert, his voice resembles a paintbrush! And when he paints, one cannot help but notice that his fingers possess a characteristic lilt that makes way for all the colors to create a beautiful concert on the canvas. And when he cooks, the taste makes an uncanny resemblance to a mother’s recipe! Though all this is unbelievable and

indecipherable, we find that it happens with remarkable ease, without any deliberate intention of doing something special.

One feels that God spent a lot of time while creating someone like him. Here is a person who has a gift of the twin qualities of intelligence and memory. His ability to recall a particular incident or a paragraph from a book or someone's behavior during a specific event or an occasion is so sharp and detailed that one wonders if his brain scans them for him! He spent only five years of his life with his mother Bhanumatibai, but his ability to recall those special memories is unbelievable! He remembers being a part of the tour to Africa with her and retains the memories from that trip in great detail. Not only he remembers how *Bhanumatibai* taught him to memorise math tables till 30, but he also recalls the childhood pranks he played with *Daaimaa*. He also correctly recalls the day his mother was admitted to the hospital for her delivery, and remembers that he never saw her come back after that day.

He remembers every moment spent with *Kanna mama*, a man with whom he spent ten years of his life, from the age of 5 to 15! And he also remembers a feeling of emptiness when *Kanna mama* passed away. While accompanying *Kumarji* on his concert tours, while sleeping, he was always sandwiched between Vasantao Achrekar and Govindrao Patwardhan. He remembers those nights clearly.

Mukulji remembers his unique friendship with Neetu Chaughule (daughter of Bandubhiyya Chaughule), their marriage and their brief married life of three and a half years. And he not only remembers every day of those three and a half years but also recalls every moment from those days! Though there is nothing much to remember, it is impossible to forget what happened in those days.

All that he possessed during the time he lived outside his house were these memories. And these memories were the reason he was ruined. It would have been better had these memories hazed with time, but in case of Mukulji, it was precisely the opposite. A man living with his family can overcome the pain and sorrow he faces because the family gives him the power to do so. But Mukulji had lost his home and his family, and all these memories became the reason for his pain and sorrow. The past occupied his present for all the twenty-four hours in a day and became the reason for all future problems in his life. And the thing which helped him overcome this was his music! Music, for him, became a support to wipe this past from his present, but that came with a hefty price, and that was the loss of sleep! There was a time when he could not sleep for twenty to twenty-five days at a stretch. Initially, the memories were the reason for this loss which was soon replaced by music. It was perhaps the most terrible time in his life; the year was 1982. He was twenty-five years old, and no one was willing to approach him, and understand him. And with him was his two and half-year-old son, who had just lost his mother.

He was now aware that the little one with him would find it difficult to live outside the house, but at the same time, he also realised that it would be difficult for him to live beneath the four walls of this house. Finally with a heavy heart and pain - difficult to even imagine or comprehend - he handed over his son to his father and turned around to leave the house. But alas, no one in the house felt the need to stop

him. Someone should have asked him where he was going and what his plans ahead were.

However, neither did anyone ask these questions, nor did *Mukulji* expect anyone to ask them. He was no more the beloved prince of *Bhanumati bai*. Instead, he was now a spoiled prince in a world that offered nothing but cruelty. The world provided him with many paths to walk. Some of them led to hermits, while some showed a way to the temples. However, none of these paths offered him a way back to his own house.

He was now on the streets wandering like a nomad. To gaze at the blazing sun during the day and to spend the night without sleep were the only terrible activities his life offered. The man who had begun his journey of illuminating the world of music was himself facing a life full of darkness. Those were torrid times.

However, there was a need to do something else darkness would have engulfed this shining star of music! It was indeed a question of life and death for Mukulji. Though everything now appeared bleak, Mukulji had the blessings of his late mother Bhanumatibai and his 'second mother' Kannamama, and this was the reason he could survive! Finally, he turned to one place which he knew would offer him peace and assure him of a complete loss of contact with the world outside. This place could also offer him some much-needed sleep, as it was quiet, peaceful and serene. It was the 'Chinmayananda Ashram of Nemavar, a place which is almost at the midpoint of the *Narmada parikrama*, the sacred Narmada, who Mukulji used to adore since childhood. The guru at the ashram, Shri Shri 1008 Vishwanath 'Prakash' Brahmchariji Maharaj always showered his affections for Mukulji.

Earlier, when Mukulji was disturbed after Kannamama's death, it was Guruji who had consoled him, and since then the former was a regular visitor to the ashram. But back then he was just 15 years old, and he had Bhanukul as his home to go back. Moreover, a glorious future beckoned him, and his life was eager to start on a positive note. But the situation was different today. Ten long years had passed, and Mukul was now without a shelter. He could not go back to Bhanukul. Instead, he had lost everything that he once had. Mukul was at Guruji's feet when he saw him. Guruji lifted him up and held him close to his chest and offered him the much-needed warmth and affection.

It was Guruji who deserved all credit for bringing Mukul back to his usual self. It was for him that Mukul could eventually become what he is today, a *Gandharva!* He lived in the ashram for five years, from 1982 to 1986. Finally, Guruji's efforts in making Mukul sing bore fruits! Mukul resumed singing, and his

schedule now was to go out, perform and return to the Ashram. During this time, two things ran parallel in his life – music and spirituality. However, this was also perhaps the most dangerous phase of his life. Surrounded by intense stress and pain, Mukul was struggling to live his life by trying to keep his mental balance intact.

But his childhood passion for reading helped him a lot. Though his life was without any smile or happiness, books and music had not left him. His colleagues at the Ashram and Guruji were beside him. Slowly and steadily, he was moving away from the troublesome things of the past. And with them, he had left behind many other things – his home, his village, his relations and also his name! Yes, he stopped using ‘Komkali’ as his last name and instead began using his father’s and mother’s name as the last name. He had now become Mukul Shivputra Bhanumatyey.

Mukul had lost everything he had a right to, including his last name. One wonders what his fault or what crime did he commit to face this was. In a dramatic turn of events laden with jealousy, Mukul was thrown out of ‘Bhanukul’ and placed at the door of Chinmayadham.

Whose *karmic* sufferings were these? Bhanutai’s? Or Mukul’s? One wonders whether life was fair to Bhanutai, a lady who had lifted the spirits of so many people around her? She was the one who, for her husband’s illness, chose to move from Mumbai to Dewas; who rescued Kumarji from the dreaded disease of tuberculosis (considered incurable during those times) and made him sing again; who chose to work as a principal at Radhabai High school. She not only managed the affairs of the house but also bought a piece of land at ‘*Mataji ki Tekdi*’ and built a beautiful home for Kumarji. A mother of glorious sons like Mukul and Yashovardhan, why didn’t the auspicious *gruhpravesh* of this beautiful house occupy a place in her fate?

Or maybe this house was deprived of fortune, as its house-maker, with her sons, was ousted from it despite building it from scratch! Instead, this house got its name ‘Bhanukul’ when Bhanutai and Yashovardhan (who was later adopted and nurtured by Bhanutai’s elder sister) left home. On the one hand, this place welcomed many visitors from different parts of the country and also offered shelter to many students at the outhouse in its backyard. But on the other hand, the fate of the house was such that its *gruhlaxmi* could not enter its premises.

It seemed that someone had practised dark magic on Bhanutai’s happy life and everything had suddenly collapsed for the worst! Bhanutai left this world, leaving behind five-year-old Mukul and then born Yashovardhan. When Bhanutai was

brought from the delivery table to the ward, Vimaltai, wife of Rahul Barpute, the editor of 'Nayi Duniya', accompanied her. Bhanutai's last words were, "I think I am sinking."

Bhanutai's elder sister Dr Triveni Kauns took up the responsibility of nurturing the newborn baby Yashovardhan. She chose to remain unmarried for the rest of her life to fulfil this responsibility for her dear sister. Kannamama too was shattered and by holding young Mukul close to him cried uncontrollably. "*Bhanu, you made me see this day*", he cried. But he was not aware what lay ahead of him.

'Bhanukul' witnessed and silently suffered all that was served on its plate.

Kannamama and Mukul also had to go through the same path.

Young Mukul waited for his mother to come back from the hospital and asked his father, "Baba, when will Aai come back?" "Aai has gone to God's place, she won't come back", Kumarji replied. That was it. Mukul never asked this question again. Instead, all his life Mukul neither asked any question nor answered back anything to anyone. That was never his nature. He was Kanna Mama's favourite Muki and chose to keep mum all throughout his life.

After Bhanutai passed away, Mukul lived in Bhanukul only for 12 years. Or rather, it was just for ten years. Ten years after Bhanu Tai died; Kanna Mama also left this world. Kanna Mama – the one who nurtured Mukul like a mother, hand-fed him food, dropped him to school and didn't have food till Mukul had his – died and Mukul's stint at Bhanukul came to an end.

Who was Kanna Mama? How was he related to Bhanutai and Kumarji or even Mukul? Was he an individual or an institution by himself? This Namboodripad Brahman's native was Paathriyad village in Kerala, but he was with Bhanutai before marriage and also was with her when she got married to Kumarji. He worked as a manager in the import-export firm owned by Bhanutai's father, Shri Narayan Kans, in Karachi. His name was K.N.S Nambiar. His strength was networking, and connecting people and this was the reason Mr Kans was successful in running this vast empire. Bhanutai's mother was a scholar, and her thoughts were modern even during those days. Kanna Mama supported both Mr and Mrs Kans in their business as well as in their home affairs. For Mrs Kans, he was like a younger brother. Their family was of five young children and three adults, and their life was moving smoothly.

However, the sudden death of Mr Kans owing to an illness applied brakes to this smoothness. Before him, one of his daughters had also met the same fate. His death left behind his wife and four children. Moreover, he did not manage to make any arrangements in his business before his demise. Kanna Mama came to assist

the family in these difficult circumstances. He was in sharp contrast to anyone in today's times, one who sticks to the company that guarantees a pay hike. However, his relations with this family were never that of an owner and an employee. Hence, he did not leave this job and chose to remain with this family of four children and an elder sister. He was devastated, but he did not collapse. "The show must go on", he told himself. He took the responsibility of the family as well as the firm.

The children in the family were young. And yet, this twenty-five-year-old gentleman continued the business. But tragedy struck twice, and soon Mrs Kans also passed away. Now no one in the house could act as a decision maker. Kanna Mama finally wound up the business and with Triveni, Usha, Dattatreya, Bhanumati – the four children – came to stay in Mumbai. His sole aim in life was to ensure a better education for all these four children. He was so devoted to these children that he chose to remain unmarried for the rest of his life. If not for himself, but he could have got married at least for these children. But the thought of imposing a step-motherly figure on them made him not think about it. (?)

However, Kanna Mama's efforts finally bore fruits. Triveni and Dattatreya became a doctor and a mechanical engineer respectively, whereas Usha completed her graduation. The younger Bhanumati completed her education at St Xavier's College.

Though Triveni became a doctor, life was still not stable for Kanna Mama. She soon became ill and many years passed in attending to her illness. She had to undergo certain surgeries as well. Around the same time, Usha got married to a successful lawyer. Usha, her husband and Dattatreya chose to pursue their career in Africa, and soon they left for their destination.

Soon Triveni recovered and started her practice. Soon, her colleague, Dr Tawre, who was practising in Dewas informed her about a work opportunity. He was a D.M.O at the District Hospital in Dewas and was keen that some of his colleagues should also work there. Likewise, he approached Triveni and sensing an excellent opportunity; Mama also did not object. So, Triveni settled in Dewas.

Only two people now stayed at the Mahim residence – Kanna Mama and Bhanumati. The latter was pursuing her M.A in English literature. Moreover, she had a sweet voice and was also interested in music.

And one day, Bhanu reached the Deodhar School of music. Located opposite to the Opera House, Deodhar School in those days was a place where many amateur singers were getting trained. Kumar Gandharva, a known figure by then, stayed at

Deodhar School for most of the time. Though he was not teaching music, Bhanu made a firm demand that she wanted Kumar to be her teacher. Everyone was surprised. But seeing the quality of her voice, Professor Deodhar agreed, and soon the learning sessions began.

Both were more or less of the same age met every day. Soon, love transpired, and this friendship took its turn towards marriage. Though Professor Deodhar was opposed to the wedding, the two chose to and eventually got married. Post marriage, Kumarji shifted his residence from Deodhar school to Bhanu's residence at Mahim. The house at Mahim now hosted three people – Kanna Mama, Kumarji and Bhanutai. While Bhanutai took utmost care of the home, both of them got the financial backing from Kanna Mama.

Kumarji and Bhanutai were now performing at concerts together. The year was 1947, and both were coming back from Kolkata's music conference, and Kumarji experienced severe pain. It was a sharp tuberculosis attack. While managing Kumarji, Bhanutai's purse got stolen. However, she finally managed to reach home. Kumarji began his treatment under Dr M.D Deshmukh (brother of economist C. D Deshmukh). During those days, *Streptomycin*, the anti-tuberculosis vaccine had to be imported from abroad, and its cost was 32 rupees, a very costly amount in those days. To arrange for a frequent dose of this vaccine, Bhanutai had to sell almost all her ornaments. But she did not borrow a single rupee from anyone. Bhanutai, Kanna Mama and Triveni tai were now ready for this new struggle.

Mumbai's polluted air was turning out to be hazardous for Kumarji's health. Triveni tai had a solution to this problem. She invited Kumarji and Bhanutai to stay at Dewas. The air in Dewas was pure. To add to it, Triveni Tai lived there. Also, the presence of Dr Tawre and her other colleagues was going to be helpful. So, Kumarji and Bhanutai left for Dewas. But the day they left was 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948, the same day Mahatma Gandhi was killed, and it resulted in a *bandh*. With great difficulty and braving the situation of no proper transport, they finally reached Dewas.

Kanna Mama was to arrive later.

And thus the 'Dewas Chapter' began in Kumarji and Bhanutai's life. Kumarji's singing had got a full stop, and he had to continue being in this state for the next six years. In those days, tuberculosis was a fatal disease. But Bhanutai spent a lot of money for his treatment. The medical assistance and advice came from home. Kanna mama and Bhanutai's *sewa*, the expensive medicines for treatment and Dewas's clean air, all saved Kumarji from this deadly disease.

When she reached Dewas, Bhanutai immediately applied for the post of a teacher in a secondary school. However, her qualifications, conversation skills and her overall personality were such that she was appointed as a principal of the school. And thus she joined as a principal of Radhabai Educational Institute. Now her life routine involved this full-time job responsibility and simultaneously attending Kumarji's health at home, and the latter included long sleepless nights. But she sustained every bit of this with a smile on her face. She attended to Kumarji like a child in the house. And when Kumarji recovered from his illness, after nine years, their life took a sweet turn. Bhanutai gave birth to a boy. This boy was cherubic and adorable like a flower and seeing him no one could hide their delight! On seeing him, Pandharinath Kolhapure exclaimed, "Mukul!"

Mukul meant a blossoming bud. And he indeed was tender and gentle like a bud! Everyone loved and pampered him. Kumarji had resumed singing just before his birth. But after his birth, Kumarji's career attained a peak! Kumarji's 'Betu' and Kanna Mama's 'Muki' was indeed lucky for all. His face was indeed a reflection of Bhanutai's. With the arrival of Mukul, her world was full of joy. And then Kanna Mama stepped in with this suggestion. Twelve years had gone by since the couple came to Dewas and their first child too was a son, a successor to the family (as per the thoughts prevalent then). So the time had come to move from a rented flat to their house. And keeping Kumarji's health and the near future in mind, Kanna Mama and Bhanutai chose a place for their house. It was '*Mataji ki Tekdi*, a peaceful and a beautiful place with greenery around it. The plan of the house was made for a vocalist— spacious and acoustically correct! The house was soon to be a home.

Mukul and Bhanukul were growing up together, and there was happiness all around. Bhanutai's brother and Mukul's maternal uncle Datta Mama invited everyone to Africa and likewise, Bhanutai, Kanna Mama, Kumarji and four and half years old Mukul were ready to leave for Africa. With them was Bapu Chaudhari, Kumarji's Tabla accompanist. Their flight was to take off from Mumbai and everyone assembled at Gurnath Bhat's Flat at Napean Sea Road in the city. And suddenly Bhanutai got a fever!

The Doctors detected Jaundice, and soon all the schedule got disturbed. Gurnath Bhat and his wife offered assistance and insisted that Kumarji and Bhanutai stay at their place. And it took almost one and half months for Bhanutai to recover. Bapu Chaudhari had already left for Dewas. But during this time, Kanna Mama frequently travelled to and fro between Dewas and Mumbai. He used to attend Bhanutai in Mumbai and then go back to Dewas to write leave applications, house maintenance etc. Finally, after one and half months, everyone flew to Africa. The

Africa trip was memorable for more than one reason – Datta Mama’s love and hospitality, travelling, sightseeing and Kumarji’s private mehfiles. And after a boat journey of 11 days, everyone came back to Dewas.

‘Bhanukul’ was now nearing completion after rigorous efforts of Kanna Mama and Bhanutai. And a ‘good news’ was soon to arrive in Bhanutai’s life. In fact, when everyone was in Mumbai doctors had detected that Bhanutai was to be a mother again! Everyone was ready to welcome the new addition to the family.

Around the same time, Dr Triveni was transferred from Dewas to Shajapur and then to Guna. Her’s was a government job, and during those days, transfers happened long distance. And as Guna was far from Dewas, she was not with Bhanutai during this delivery. When Mukul was born, Bhanutai was admitted to a hospital at Indore, and even this time she was at the same place.

As this was her second time, everyone was relaxed. They had assembled at Rahulji Barpute’s residence at Indore and were waiting for the good news. Mrs Vimlatai Barpute was with Bhanutai since that morning.

By afternoon, however, Bhanutai’s condition became critical, and soon it deteriorated. As baby Yashovardhan entered this world, Bhanutai made an unfortunate exit from this world. It was all over. After hearing this news, Kanna Mama was shattered, and a pall of gloom descended over ‘Bhanukul.’

Next day, three people travelled from Indore to Dewas in a taxi – Kumarji, Kanna Mama and Mukul. Everyone was quiet. Unable to locate his mother, who was with them while going to Indore, Mukul asked, “Baba, where is Aai?” Kumarji replied, “*Deva Ghari*”, (meaning ‘God’s home’, a word in Marathi describing death). Kumarji had performed the last rites of Bhanutai at Indore on the same evening she died. All throughout her life, Bhanutai was a people’s person. After their parents’ death, Kanna Mama nurtured her and her siblings. However, she spent her last moments in isolation. Usha, Dattatray, Triveni, Mukul – no one was beside her when she passed away. Except for Kanna Mama, no one witnessed her last rites. Everything was unexpected. Throughout the taxi journey from Indore to Dewas, Kanna Mama held Mukul close to his chest.

Soon, everyone entered the new house. It was named ‘Bhanukul’, however, neither Bhanutai was a part of this house, nor Yashovardhan. For the next ten years after Bhanutai’s death, Kanna Mama nurtured Mukul just like a mother! He was nearing seventy, and yet, he was fit and fine. People had begun to visit ‘Bhanukul.’ Kumarji started giving regular concerts in this new house. And the person in

charge of all this was Kanna Mama. He knew that there were many more responsibilities he had to fulfil.

And one day, Kanna Mama experienced severe stomach ache, and the pain worsened. Still, under those circumstances, he went to Pathariyad, his native village, and transferred the rights of his property to his brother. He bid a final goodbye to the house which he had left when he was 14 or 15 years old.

Under these circumstances, Mukul was not ready to let Kanna Mama travel alone. So, Kumarji and Mukul both accompanied Kanna Mama, and while he went for those formalities, they both stayed at Mr Naik's house at Telicheri. And after fifteen days, all of them came back to Dewas. Mukul was scheduled to leave for Mumbai to visit Wamanrao Deshpande. But all throughout his stay in Mumbai, he was thinking about Mama. Three weeks after he had come to Mumbai, he was to perform at Ramji Deshmukh's (Younger brother of C.D Deshmukh) house and then was to leave for Dewas. And when he came back to Wamanrao's house, Satyasheel Deshpande broke the bad news to him. "Kanna mama passed away. Four days back", he said. Mukul experienced intense dizziness as he heard this news. As he travelled back to Dewas, Kanna Mama's words echoed in his ears, "Muki, how many times have I told you, don't see elsewhere. Look ahead and walk." However, this time it was difficult to look ahead and walk. Memories of Kanna Mama continued to pull him back in time.

The travel till Pathariyad was the first time when Mukul travelled alone with Kumarji. It was as if Mukul met his father for the first time after his mother's death. He experienced a lot of things during this fortnight. Once in Kanna Mama's house at Pathariyad, Bhanutai was mentioned in a conversation, and young Mukul witnessed both Kumarji and Kanna mama cry loudly. Maybe deep within, they felt that their days of living together were now limited. Many memories of Kanna Mama flashed in Mukul's mind during his travel from Mumbai to Dewas.

"Muki, keep the chappals out, else you will wake up Kumarji", Kanna Mama used to say this to Mukul every time he came home from school. As he stood at the main door, he remembered these words of Kanna Mama. But he was not to hear them again. Never. For the next two years, Mukul travelled a lot to Mumbai and Pune. But when he came to Dewas, he remained made sure he was very close to Kumarji.

Kumarji also reciprocated by giving a lot of time to Mukul. He used to sing, and Mukul used to follow him. It was as if a 'Gandharva Kumar' was following the steps of a 'Kumar Gandharva.' Life in Bhanukul was bliss for Mukul, and in those days, he learned and grasped a lot of things from Kumarji.

It was the passing of a legacy, a *gayaki* from a stalwart, a legend to a prodigy who would become a maestro in the later years. *Bandishes* – some heard by the world and some yet unheard – were being taught and compositions, those known to the world and those which the world was to know in the coming years were passed on from father to son. This son was indebted to his father for all this knowledge, a debt that was impossible to pay back.

In fact, Mukul had asked his father to teach him when he was nine years old. Self-inspired, he had told Kumarji, “Baba, please teach me music.” And Kumarji, Mukul’s first *guru* had happily obliged.

In fact, Kumarji and Bhanutai had taught Mukul how to sing the *shadaj* – *Sa* – the first musical note when he was very young. After Bhanutai’s death, Kumarji taught Mukul how to tune the *Tanpuras*. He also used to make Mukul accompany him on the *Tabla* during his *riyaaz*. But when nine-year-old Mukul, in a new *kurta & pyjama*, announced that he wants to learn music, Kumarji’s joy knew no bounds. The first *raag* that he taught Mukul was *Bilawal*.

When he was young, Mukul’s voice resembled that of his father. But when he grew up, it changed. His beautiful voice now had developed a base and a much-needed swirl. However, the instances of accompanying Kumarji on the *tanpura* and provide vocal support in his concerts were very limited for him. (In Mumbai, Delhi and Amritsar).

Moreover, Kumarji’s company was not a frequent occurrence for Mukul. Whenever he used to accompany Kumarji on concert tours, his accommodation was always with Govindrao Patwardhan or Vasatrao Achrekar. And Mukul never complained about this separation either. But he liked it when Kumarji was with him, and he relished and cherished his company. He always longed for the company of his father. But there was a vast difference in what he wanted and what he got.

Hence, Kanna Mama bridged the gap created by the absence of Mukul’s mother and the intermittent presence of his father. Kumarji was also aware of the space occupied by Kanna Mama in Mukul’s mind. In fact, it was because of Kanna Mama that Kumarji was relaxed about Mukul. And hence, Kanna Mama’s exit had affected him deeply. He now tried in his ways to support Mukul. He made sure Mukul remained indulged in something or the other, and he also invested time in him. Music, of course, was helping them to bond. However, he was aware of the vacuum that was created in their lives, and it was affected him deeply. But this finally resulted in Mukul getting Kumarji’s company, something that he had

wished from the bottom of his heart. And with Kumarji's musical notes, his mind was moving from restlessness to peace and tranquillity.

But this was not to last long. When Bhanukul was witnessing this enriching transfer of musical legacy, there was a new storm. And it resulted in Mukul moving away from the company of his father.

Soon, this vortex reached its peak and Mukul could not see this shattered side of Kumarji anymore. And seventeen years old Mukul found his way. He realised that the cause of all this discord was he, himself. "So, what if I move out from here", he thought. So, Mukul moved away from Bhanukul, either by travelling to Mumbai to learn music from Wamanrao Deshpande or by visiting Trivenitai to meet Yashovardhan.

But the longing and affinity for Kumarji used to bring him back to Bhanukul after some days. Those were the days when he began to feel that he was getting neglected in the scheme of things. In this state of mind, the frequency of his visits to the Ashram at Nemavar increased.

Vishwanath Prakash, the guru at Chinmaydham Ashram, was very attached to Mukul. Around the same time, Mukul was also attracted to the spiritual atmosphere at the Ashram. And his interactions with Guruji made him aware of his self-identity. All these days, owing to the neglect and condemnation he faced, he had developed a feeling of helplessness and failure. But conversations with Guruji made him eradicate these feelings from his mind. In fact, they helped him transform and shape his personality. This transformation, in fact, made him an extraordinary individual. It made him realise the knowledge he possessed and also the gift of music he had within him. In fact, it inspired him to concentrate on the potential he had and also make efforts to develop and grow it.

He decided to learn music from every available source around him. It was an essential phase in Mukul's life, a stage which is the reason for the downfall of many youngsters. Mukul, on the other hand, balanced himself well and began the journey ahead. His sole aim was to gain knowledge and build on what was taught by his father. He was creating his path on an arduous journey.

Mukul took guruji's advice, obtained Kumarji's permission, and came to Mumbai. He was to stay at Wamanrao Deshpande's house at Walkeshwar. Money was still a problem, but that was solved quickly. When connoisseurs came to know of his arrival in Mumbai, they were overjoyed and arranged a few of his concerts in the city. Prominent among them were Ravi Date, Chandrashekhar Rele, Wamanrao Deshpande, Soli Batliwala and Shyam Godbole. Mr Ram Kolhatkar

arranged his concert at Pune. Around the same time, at the age of nineteen, Mukul also performed in Pune's Sawai Gandharva Music Festival. It made him earn some money, and his stay in Mumbai was now comfortable. Moreover, he had started his *taleem* under Wamanrao Deshpande.

Wamanrao used to teach for some time in the morning. But Mukul had an enormous appetite for knowledge. He was deeply involved in music and wanted to invest every moment of the day in some activity. And it now included learning Pakhawaj from Pt. Arjun Shejwal, Nom-tom and Dhrupad Dhamaar from Krushnarao Ginde, traditional thumri under Baburao Rele and Voice Culture from Dr Ashok Ranade. All these gurus did not live near to each other. Though Mukul had money in his pocket, he spent it judiciously. He either used to walk everywhere or used the bus, but strictly avoided the cab or a hotel. His daily destinations were Masjid Bunder (Shejwal), the Vallabh Sangeet Vidyalaya at Sion Circle (K. G Ginde), Girgaon (Rele) and University at Churchgate (Dr Ranade) and finally back to Walkeshwar. Once home, he used to spend time reading until late night. And what did he learn? It was the Sanskrit language.

Once, at his Dewas residence, Mukul had witnessed an intense discussion between the legendary Kannada poet D.R Bendre and the great Marathi poet Vasant Bapat. The subject was Sanskrit literature. In fact, Mr Bapat had expressed appreciation on Mukul's keen interest in the subject. Kumarji had informed Mr Bapat that Mukul was studying Sanskrit. When Mr Bapat browsed through Mukul's notebook, he noticed the use of the word 'Anaduhu.' "Do not waste your time on words like these. They do not come in use later. If you visit Mumbai, come to my house. I will teach you Sanskrit", he told Mukul. Hence, Mukul spent his afternoon sessions at the Mumbai University at Fort and learned Sanskrit from Mr Bapat. The latter took a keen interest in teaching, and Mukul duly reciprocated.

This schedule lasted for two years, from the age of seventeen to age of nineteen. These two years in Mumbai were full of learning and were dedicated to obtaining knowledge. Other than this, Mukul also spent time visiting museums, art galleries and archives and listened to old recordings and observed paintings. Once, at the National Center of Performing Art (NCPA), Mukul requested Mr Menon to give him access to listen to old audio tapes of Carnatic music. Of those, he fell in love with the music of K.V Narayanswamy and M. D Ramanathan. In fact, he felt that he should learn Carnatic music under K.V Narayanswamy. However, Kumarji was not in favour of Mukul going to Chennai and learning under Mr Narayanswamy. He resisted initially, but then he went to Chennai and spoke to Mr Narayanswamy that Mukul is coming to learn from him. Mukul then reached Mr Narayanswamy's home in Chennai. However, Mr Narayanswamy whispered something to his wife

right in front of Mukul and after a while informed Mukul that he wouldn't be able to teach him. Mukul was astonished about this outcome. But he did not give up!

He proceeded to 'Kalakshetra' where Dr M.D Ramanathan taught music. It was afternoon, and Dr Ramanathan was about to leave for home. Mukul introduced himself, and after hearing him, a joyous Dr Ramanathan took him home. After showing him his house, he asked Mukul to visit him there at 2 in the afternoon every day. He stayed at Chennai for a year.

Shri Baliga, the brother-in-law of Canara Bank's then custodian Mr C.E Kamat, arranged Mukul's accommodation at a lodge nearby. In those days, Chennai offered only three things – Idli, Dosa and rice. It was difficult for someone like Mukul who was used to eating *Chapati* and *Bhakri*. Moreover, he also had to adjust to a new place, new people, new language and a new form of music. But his hunger for music was so intense that all these appeared mundane, and his learning under Dr Ramanathan began.

Apart from these learning sessions, Mukul also spent time studying the notation system of the Carnatic system. While exploring the music, he also studied Tyagaraja's 'Pancharatnakruti' in great depth. Once when Dr Ramanathan chose to discuss 'Pancharatnakruti', he was joyous to find out about Mukul's knowledge of the subject and appreciated his studious attitude. After this appreciation, he began a gentle humming of Raag Gaul. Mukul too started singing and followed him. And as the improvisation went ahead, Dr Ramanathan stopped abruptly. Seeing a surprised Mukul, he said, "In the tradition of Carnatic music, a guru should never teach this raag formally to his student. The student has to hear his guru sing and learn on his own. If this raag is taught formally, then it results in a separation between a teacher and his student."

All this was new for Mukul. But by that time both had sung this raag for a reasonable amount of time. After this incident, Mr Shriram Poojari called Mukul for a concert at Solapur, and likewise, Mukul left Chennai and was busy in a series of concerts. But there was still a lot to be learnt from Dr Ramanathan. However, Dr Ramanathan suddenly became severely ill, and the illness was such that he neither could teach Mukul nor anyone else. Unfortunately, this illness led to his demise after a few years. But this was an end to a beautiful *guru-shishya* relationship that had developed and was on its way to grow even further. And the belief associated with Raag Gaul had come true in an unfortunate way.

Dr Ramanathan had gone away from Mukul's life, but his teachings had added a new feather in Mukul's already glorious cap! He now knew many compositions from the rich Carnatic tradition, and it would have been nice had Mukul got to

learn from him for some more time. But what he learned from him was equally enriching.

Mukul had got a guru who was extraordinarily soft-spoken and down to earth. The relation between the guru and the shishya was of mutual affection. Dr Ramanathan was like a bright spot of light when Mukul's life was going through a dark tunnel. For him, his presence was guiding as well as assuring. And now as he exited, it seemed that Mukul's life would again go through a dark tunnel. But this time, Mukul did not lose his balance. It was because a year with Dr Ramanathan had filled positive energy in his mind and body and it had made him a self-illuminating star, and he was now not afraid of any darkness around him.

After Dr Ramanathan's death, a disappointed Mukul came back to Dewas. Under those circumstances, he did not start anything new in his life immediately. Mr Shriram Poojari, however, continued making arrangements for his concerts and this kept his musical life moving. Around the same time, Mukul's childhood friendship with Suneeta, the daughter of Bandubhaiyya Chaughule – Kumarji's accompanist and a family friend – further developed and matured into romance. After coming back to Dewas, the frequency of Mukul's visits to the Chaughule household had increased, and soon after a year, he declared his intention of marrying Suneeta. Kumarji wanted them to wait for some more time because Mukul was 21 years old whereas Suneeta had just turned 19!

But Mukul was not ready to wait. In Suneeta, he found a person who was his own and whom he could love. Finally, they both got married, and there arose a hope that Bhanukul will now finally smile. But the same was not to happen. Seeing that the daughter-in-law was also not happy, Kumarji and Mukul would experience gloom. And at the same time, another person entered Mukul's life. Neetu was soon expecting a baby. A new member was soon to make way into the house. Typically, the daughter-in-law of the house, the expecting mother is pampered by one and all! However, nothing of this was seen, and this worried Mukul. Under these circumstances, Neetu gave birth to a baby boy. Mukul was now a father and Kumarji, a grandfather. The Komkalli family got their heir. However, this bundle of joy could not translate the house to smile. A year passed by quickly.

It must be stressed that when Mukul came back to Dewas, his personality had grown by leaps and bounds. In the three and a half odd years he spent outside, he had touched upon many aspects of music. He also had enriched himself through his studies, extensive reading, introspection and practice. Apart from this knowledge, he also got married, and a new member had entered the house. Also, he now had a child - a baby boy - who gave immense joy to Kumarji, now a grandfather. A boy

with so many accomplishments would have become the toast of the house. But it seemed that Mukul was less fortunate on this front.

But the one and half years that Mukul spent at Bhanukul after his marriage was very memorable for him. On his one side was Kumarji, while on the other hand was Neetu and on his lap was his baby boy. Mukul was happy and contented. Though there were agonising moments around, he tried his best to search for happiness within them.

In those days, Bhanukul had another visitor who had a high affinity for music. He was Balubhaiyya Apte, nephew of Dhrupad maestro Keshavrao Apte who was a famed artist at Indore and also a vocalist in the *Darbar* of Tukojirao Holkar. Balubhaiyya, then 72, used to travel twice a week from Ujjain to Dewas only because of his attachment and affinity towards Mukul. He taught *Dhrupad* compositions to Mukul in different rhythmic cycles like *Chautaal*, *Tevra*, *Dhamar*, *Shoolphakta* and *Brahmtaal*. In addition to this, he also taught him compositions penned down by musical legends of medieval India, Tansen and Baiju Bawra. Mukul not only sang these compositions but also penned down their notations. But Bhanukul did not favour this teaching for long, and soon Balubhaiyya's visit stopped.

Around the same time, Mukul travelled to Mumbai and learned and assimilated *Shrutishastra* from Balasaheb Achrekar. Hence, Mukul always holds Balasaheb Achrekar in high regard and considers him as his guru.

In those days, Mukul struck an excellent balance between his involvement at home and the concerts he gave outside. Moreover, he also started 'Anup', an organisation dedicated to music. Through 'Anup' he organised six concerts in a year involving artists from different parts of the country. He also organised a conference. Apart from all this, he also gave a few concerts over the radio.

However, Neetu supported Mukul by managing things on the home turf. She had a sweet voice, and her little humming would leave Mukul mesmerised! Of course, she was the daughter of Bandubhaiyya Chaughule, a musical scholar and hence her voice was nothing but melodious. Still, she would have needed a lot of efforts to sing with Mukul or accompany him. Or rather, Mukul would have required those efforts.

But Neetu's support helped Mukul recover and firmly stand on his own feet. It was significant for someone like him, who had faced neglect and avoidance in his life so far. For the first time in his life, he was curious about what lay ahead in his life and was keen to welcome it with open arms. Mukul and Neetu's life blossomed,

and 'Anup' also became a part of it. With the concerts curated from Anup's platform to concerts over the radio throughout the day and also performances throughout the country, Mukul was the apple in the eyes of Kumarji, Neetu and everyone around them. Alas, this had to become counterproductive, and it did with an undesired effect. Mukul was once again pushed out of Bhanukul.

As he moved out of the house with his wife and son, he said, "... I have to live away from you, Baba! So it does not matter if it is Dewas or Indore or Delhi or even Calcutta, everything is the same! I will live anywhere and manage myself."

Mukul's association with Kumarji had lasted only for these two and half years. These years were like an oasis in the scorching heat of a desert! As he once again began his life without Kumarji, he was not aware of the conflagration that lay ahead. Destiny has its own set of shocks and surprises for every one of us, isn't it?

Though Mukul was devastated from within, Neetu was still the source of his courage for facing the world. Both of them started their new inning in a small house at Indore. Mukul's usual routine – concerts from 'Anup's' platform, performances on the radio and his concert performances elsewhere – made him forget his past troubles. Instead, he chose to remain inattentive to what lay ahead. He never nurtured a feeling of hatred towards anyone. He just added this experience to the list of experiences that had caused trouble in his life so far. It did not occur to him that this time things had worsened like never before!

The house at Indore now welcomed visitors, well-wishers and foes alike! The couple greeted everyone with a smile and was always ready to ensure a hospitable treatment to anyone who visited them. However, they failed to notice that evil-minded people were slowly penetrating their life. The bad omens which had followed Mukul all throughout his life had made their presence in this house as well.

Meanwhile, Mukul was expanding his territories as an artist. Though he was getting offers from musical dramas and films, he humbly rejected them, as classical music was the sole path he had chosen. Neetu was a perfect host to their colleagues from 'Anup.' Though most of them were from the Northern part of the country, they appreciated the Maharashtrian cuisines like *Puran Poli* and *Modak* cooked by her. As their son was very young, she handled the home turf! However, in the coming years, she was ready to be with Mukul in jointly pursuing their endeavours ahead. Their house was always filled with

people. After dinner, they all used to discuss their plans ahead and then Neetu used to supplement their dinner with a cup of coffee.

Neetu's friendly nature was praised by one and all! She had also developed a good connection with their neighbours. With her burner stove and an electric heater, her hospitality had made everyone smile. They had booked a new gas connection as well. And like all other days, everyone assembled for dinner and began discussing the plans ahead. After a while, Neetu got up and went to the kitchen and all of a sudden everyone heard a loud shriek! Mukul rushed into the kitchen, and the others followed him and what they saw inside was utterly shocking! The stove had exploded, and Neetu's silk saree had caught fire! Mukul came to his senses and quickly poured the water in the earthen pot that lay inside the kitchen. But it was too late, and the fire had caused a lot of burns on Neetu's body. By that time, the neighbours had also joined to offer help, and one of them started Mukul's scooter. Mukul sat in the backseat and held Neetu's body in his hands, and they all rushed to the nearby corner. From there, they boarded an autorickshaw and rushed to a private hospital nearby. However, this hospital refused to admit the patient. Everyone soon rushed to a government hospital, but on their way, Neetu was continually telling Mukul, "I won't survive, you, please take care of yourself." "You will be alright, I am with you", Mukul kept telling her.

Neetu was in the hospital for the next thirty-six hours. She only uttered Mukul's name. But it was difficult for Mukul to witness the scene inside and hence he chose to stay outside and sat leaning against the wall of the room. In those thirty-six hours, police entered the room and thrice recorded Neetu's statement. In domestic accidents like these, the needle of suspicion is always pointed towards the husband. However, Neetu rejected these suspicions completely. In fact, all those present in the house during this unfortunate accident also supported Neetu's statements and stated that Mukul was not guilty. Finally, the police were convinced. However, Mukul's foes continued to cast their evil shadows on him.

During Neetu's funeral, a pained Mukul said, "You burnt for 36 hours... but I will burn for the rest of my life. I could not save you... I could not uphold my promise then... but I will hold this one..." People who witnessed Mukul saying this still get Goosebumps when they talk about it.

Though Mukul's personal life was devastated because of this unexpected, unfortunate incident, his ill-wishers continued to indulge in false propaganda about him and did not waste this opportunity in his defamation. His world at Indore was made to stop, and his stay in the rented house was discontinued without his knowledge. As if, there was no need for Mukul even to live his life!

But did Mukul himself want to live? He had now distanced himself from everyone, even from his music! It was as if he had entered the state of *Smashan Vairagya* – a state of absolute detachment! In this state, the body enters a state of *shunya* – zero – and apart from your breathing; you detach yourself from your thoughts, your sight, your food intake and all your desires. There was nothing but darkness in Mukul’s life.

However, light soon began to replace this darkness. Mukul’s life had now a ‘Prakash’ – Guruji Vishwanath Prakash of Chinmaydham. Words will fall short if we describe Mukul’s stay at Chinmaydham in those days. Prakash Guruji was a father figure to many in the Ashram. In fact, he helped Mukul restructure his life and guided him in all possible ways, just like a father would do for his son!

Though Guruji had renounced this world, he got in touch with many organisations across the country that were working for the cause of music and accepted their performance invitations on behalf of Mukul. He also helped Mukul restart his concerts over the radio. Moreover, he also concentrated on Mukul’s food habits, his peace of mind and his travel and tickets. Though he was the head of the Ashram, he did not think of his position and stature and became one with Mukul in all his activities. During Mukul’s stay in the ashram, he played all roles in his life, the role of a guru, a father, a mother and also a friend!

He was also keen on Mukul accepting every concert invitation. Moreover, he did not entertain anyone’s interference while dealing with Mukul.

Prakash Guruji was an immensely learned and a knowledgeable man. In fact, he had moved from the *Dnyaan Maarg*, the path of knowledge to the *Bhakti Maarg*, the way of devotion. He knew almost all Indian languages and spoke them with equal ease as his mother tongue. Moreover, he had a much-disciplined routine. His morning would start with a prayer, followed by a walk over the nearby hillock and then a bath in the Narmada River. Then he used to cook *khichadi* for everyone in the Ashram, take a bowl-full of it for himself and give another bowl to Mukul and then the rest to others. At night, he used to read the newspaper, followed by meditation and then sleep. Because Mukul had an inbuilt sense of discipline, he could live at the Ashram with Guruji, else life there was not welcome to someone who lacked discipline.

It was difficult and almost impossible to restructure Mukul’s life, but Guruji made it possible. Mukul’s state of mind resembled that of *Arjun* during the war of *Mahabharat*, clueless and directionless until Guruji in the form of *Krishna* came and showed him direction. “*Nyas* (renouncement) with a *samyak buddhi* (a proper, able intelligence) is *sanyas*.” “*Yog sadhana* is nothing but conquering your desires

and distractions through the abilities we are well-versed in”, he used to say. Guruji was himself a musician, and hence not only he had a flavour of music but also understood the importance of music in Mukul’s life and the essence of Mukul in Indian Classical Music. Through him, Mukul also learned ancient poetry and the works of many saints.

Mukul’s life was back on track, and he had spent five years in this Ashram. Once, during *Navratri*, Mukul had gone to some other place for work, and Guruji’s health suddenly collapsed. And even before Mukul could know about this and reach the hospital, Guruji had passed away.

It was an unfortunate development, but Mukul by now was used to the frequent separation of loved ones from his life. However, after Prakashji’s death, Mukul did not involve himself anymore in Chinmaydham. In fact, many people in the Ashram looked up to Mukul as their guru, after Prakashji. But Mukul was not keen to attach himself to anything now.

But during his stay at the Ashram, Mukul had devoted himself to his studies, yoga, exercise and meditation. He now was consistent in his performances across the country and had earned enough name and fame for himself. He was now *Pandit Mukul Shivputra* and had just turned thirty. After Prakashji’s death, he chose not to stay in the ashram. “Don’t move away from your duties”, Prakashji had often said this to Mukul and for the latter; they had indeed turned out to be truly meaningful.

And Mukul began with his continuous and tireless wanderings! But these wanderings were not without a purpose. They were not merely to pass the time. Instead, they were peregrinations of an artist around his art; this was a journey of a devotee in search of his God; it was travel of a body in search of its soul!

In these explorations that lasted for more than twelve years, Mukulji did not rest at a particular place. Instead, this travel continued without bothering about the scorching heat, or the chilling winters or the lashing rains. During these tough times, neither did anyone come forward to offer any assistance to him, nor did they show any concern towards him! No one bothered to feel where and under what circumstances would this *Gandharva* of Indian Music would spend his night! But during these times, Mukulji reached the core of Indian Music, by travelling in the remotest interior parts of the country. Here he unearthed a vast treasure of folk music, mostly unheard by many! However, his notes about the travel, notations of the music, his photographs of rural life and the recordings of the folk music were all lost over the passage of time, and people who travelled with him snatched some of it that he could preserve. But, despite not having a ‘hard copy’ of these

findings, he has saved its 'soft copy' in his head and mind! And when he gets in a mood, he applies his 'password', and a treasure of music is downloaded before us. Countless 'folders' and 'files' of folk music from many languages like Malwi, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi, Bhojpuri and their many dialects make us wonderstruck!

Despite all the knowledge and the intellect he possessed, why didn't anyone come forward and offer help to Mukulji? Out of the many, I am aware of the two prominent reasons. One is the defamation that his foes and ill-wishers have bestowed upon him (and they still do). These people have created a particular image, and they ask others not to entertain Mukulji or talk to him. Many years back, even we were told not to allow him to enter the house. And when we decided to make him stay with us, these very people specially came to meet us and asked us to change our mind. "He will die due to his deeds" was one of the sentences which we had to hear.

It was because of these conspiracies against him; people neither offered him shelter nor help. The second reason is the tendency of the people of not providing support to an 'outsider' in the family, lest that person ends up disturbing the set fabric and tuning of the house. These people may feel for the person or many even speak well about him/her. But they do not take the next step of offering help, which is much needed in those circumstances. Moreover, these were the people who had 'heard' a lot about Mukulji and hence they chose not to take the 'risk' of inviting or accommodating him to their house. And because of all this, Mukulji remained without shelter on his head for all those years.

But the most important thing is that after Neetu's unfortunate death, Mukulji did not marry for the second time. He could have pointed the finger at his very young son and used that as a reason to marry again. Some women could have got attracted towards his personality. But he chose to not think of them at all, as it was impossible to replace Neetu from his mind. Even today, he regrets the fact that he could not save her life and that regret will always remain in his life.

But he remained without shelter and continued to suffer until the forty-fifth year of his life. But later in his life, he felt the need of having people with and around him. That may be because he would have desired somebody's presence during some illness. Or maybe he would have had a good experience of people in these years. However, owing to the prior damage done to his reputation and the defamation done to his personality, he faced insults from anyone and everyone he approached. It resulted in frustration, and this continued almost like a daily routine.

He had to face legal battles during these days, and it made him move towards consuming alcohol. However, whenever he drank alcohol, he was portrayed in bad light. In fact, it was terrible for a sensitive person like him to face his own people in court. Instead, he chose to abstain from the court proceedings. In fact, he did not even hire a lawyer for himself and eventually lost everything that he had, and that was his own. And even after snatching everything from him, his foes continued his defamation and character assassination. Started in his late teens, this defamation had continued even in his late forties and early fifties! Despite these defamations, Mukulji was loved by the connoisseurs of music, and he was still a *Gandharva* for all of them!

These twenty-five years in Mukulji's life were like a kite flying without a string. He was subjected to everything a person without shelter on his head and without the support of his people would be! Moreover, he was a gifted artist and many times it was because of this gift; many bad experiences came his way. Had he been an ordinary person, people would not have bothered much about him. But he was an exceptional person, an outstanding artist. And hence, everyone wanted to take advantage of him and use him. People have sold his art, or instead, it can be said that they went on to sell him as a person! Though he also met decent and cultured people, those were very few. Unfortunately, a majority of the people he met was either thieves or addicts or possessed cunning or manipulative nature. These were the people who earned money through his art and cheated him. And when Mukulji used to realise that he has been duped, his frustration would shoot up. It would make him consume alcohol to forget the experience and escape the pain. These manipulative people did not allow him to live, whereas the gift of art he possessed did not let him die!

However, there were times when he would overcome all this and get back to music. He would realise that what he possesses is not only uncommon but very special! The musician inside him would wake up to life; the folk music researcher inside him would stand up, and the *rasikas* would hear his voice in some part of the country. And his fans would heave a sigh of relief knowing that he is somewhere amongst us and serving music.

His fans and well-wishers are present in almost every part of the country. Mr Ashok Bajpayee is one such prominent name among those who helped him in this ardent journey. When he was a member of the *Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad*, he arranged for Mukulji's concerts in different parts of the country. The Parishad organised these concerts. Mukulji also sang for the *Gandharva Mahavidyalaya* in Delhi and *SPICMACAY*. Around the same time, Mukulji also got a fellowship from the Human Resource Development Ministry (Central Government).

After Kumarji's death, the *Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad* conferred upon him the prestigious *Kumar Gandharva Puraskar*, and he also got an award from

Delhi's *Raza Foundation*. However, after so many years devoted to music, the government of India has failed to acknowledge his contribution. Here is the man who has researched Indian Classical Music since he was very young and has contributed to its development. Why does the government shy away from acknowledging these valuable contributions is not known! A person with a calibre of a *Bharat Ratna* award has not even been considered for a *Padmashree*, or the other *Padma* awards is indeed a disgrace to a country that boasts of a rich tradition of arts and culture. However, the love that he has got from his fans and admirers is more valuable and precious than any other award. Connoisseurs and commoners alike, everyone calls him a *Gandharva*, thus underlying their love and affection for him.

Mukulji was living his life without any proper support or shelter. His personal life was at its lowest ebb. His so-called 'friends' and 'accompanists' had exploited him thoroughly.

The organisers earned lot money through his concert performances. But only a minuscule amount came his way. Who were these people that were leading a luxurious life at his expense? Under the guise of a 'rehab', these people tied him to a place, brought him out during his performances and then again pushed him back to lock him up. They all played this game with him and exploited him for the art he possessed! His art was like a goldmine unearthed on a poor man's land! Everyone had access to plunder it and use it howsoever one liked! All this affected his conduct during some concerts, and people left no stone unturned in highlighting it and branded him as someone who is never in his senses. But at the same time, his live concerts, his recordings made many organisers and recording companies earn a huge amount of money. But Mukulji did not even get the entire honorarium committed to him. Rather, he got a minimal amount for himself after these people had gobbled large parts of it. And when he tried to escape from this vicious scheme of things, he experienced a threat to his life. Hearing Mukulji's experiences would make us lose faith in the existence of human values! Abduction, captivity, physical abuse – Mukulji has gone through all these painful experiences.

And one fine day, he escaped from such forced confinement and reached the residence of people who he felt he could trust. However, here too, he experienced the same thing – betrayal! The people here got in touch with the place from where Mukulji had escaped. And those people soon left for Nashik to get hold of Mukulji. However, till they reached, Mukulji was kept under house arrest. He was helpless. He completely stopped the intake of food and water. The place where he was held

as a captive was very near to a local shop that served liquor and Mukulji began to consume liquor that made him sleep. On gaining consciousness, he would bang his head on the floor as an indication of helplessness and frustration. Hence, the boys who were guarding this place provided him with more liquor to make him sleep again. It now seemed that this suffering would lead to a fatal end. His health collapsed drastically. With no food and only supply of liquor to the body, Mukulji's condition became critical. The news about Mukulji that had rocked the nation and the world of music alike was about to get published.

And yet again, his life experienced a miracle, a *chamatkar!* At a time when it felt that there was nothing but darkness in his life, there was a ray of light, and his life was filled with new hope. In every difficult phase so far, someone or the other has entered his life to help him and pull him out of difficulty! Likewise, his condition was now known to people who were close to him. While a majority of them sympathised with him, they did so from the comfort of their house and eventually did nothing! However, a few of them who cared for him were desperate to help him. One of those was Mr Vasatrao Achrekar, a man who for almost thirty-five years had not only accompanied him on his concerts but also had helped him manage them. The other was Mukulji's guru from the Ashram at Nemawar, Shri. Vishwanath Prakash. And when the critical moment arrived, both of them sent their representatives to rescue Mukulji, one by the last name Nemawarkar and the second, Achrekar.

A speeding Mercedes zoomed past the road from Pune to Nashik with yours truly and our friend Mr Anil Nemawarkar in it. When I had taken this decision, Milind was the first one to support me. "We should help Mukul in this difficult situation", Baba had said. Apart from this, another person's support was very crucial for me. It was of Mr Lalitkumar Jain, national president of CREDAI. I have hardly taken any further decision without his 'go ahead.'

In the past fifteen years of my societal work, 'LK' has had a significant role to play. "Bring him here, rest I will manage", he said. Now my road was clear. But it was nevertheless a difficult task.

The entire exercise was analogous to rescuing a prey from its cruel predators! Mr Nemawarkar was at his diplomatic best in these life-threatening circumstances and finally arrived at a breakthrough after almost a month! On the one hand, Mukulji's health was deteriorating and on the other, had to deal with people who placed no value on his life! We won the battle only because we had Mr Anil Nemawarkar with us.

However, the Nashik Episode turned out to be very dangerous. Not only Mukulji, but our life was also in danger. And during the most crucial moments, in the end, I approached *Sharmila Vahini* – Mrs Sharmila Thackeray! She, along with Atul Sarpotdar, Shirish Parker and Anil Nemawarkar worked hard and finally, we had Mukulji with us at Pune. In fact, Atul ji and his entire family stood firmly behind us and provided us with their valuable support. With this, we had given a solid answer to the people from Madhya Pradesh who had made an ungenerous claim of tying Mukulji's feet with a chain and bring him back.

I am proud and glad that my people have always stood up the occasion and helped me!

Back home, making Mukulji healthier was my priority. However, the balancing act of not disturbing his career at the same time was a difficult task! Initially, Mukulji's weight was 48 kg. However, I decided that he would start giving concerts only after weighing 70 kg and becoming healthier.

As a first step, 'LK' arranged a mini theatre for Mukulji's 'Swarsadhan' classes for free! This mini theatre was located in the BSA Complex building on Junglee Maharaj Road. He followed it by arranging his concert at his residence and paid him a large amount of it. (With this amount, we could buy the necessary furniture and household items in his new house). It was followed by his first public concert at Pune's Yashvantrao Chavan Auditorium, and it was LK who lit its inaugural lamp

In a concert that will be remembered by many, the audience gave a standing ovation to Mukulji and not once, but three times in a row! We were happy that our efforts had begun to bear fruits, but the real battle lay ahead!

We *Achrekars* have possessed some peculiar characteristics! Though we are extremely sensitive to things, we are equally tough by our nature. In our house, with a notable exception of me, no one drinks even a single cup of tea! And while I drink it, my cup count never exceeds two! Hence, we expect that whosoever comes to live with us follows the rules and regulations set up for the house. However, due to Mukulji's adjusting nature and his ability of readily assimilating with everyone, we never had to point out anything to him.

By the way, I wish to make a statement that is bound to surprise many who are reading this article. 'Mukulji is not a social drinker!' Anyone and everyone who meets him and interacts with him in our house feel astonished about the kind of rumours that were spread on his name, and the type of prejudice people have maintained about him all these years.

While taking care of his health and routine and also regularising his career, I made sure that I studied his case history. And the first successful step in this direction was getting Mukulji off his sleeping pills! “I could sleep well...” he had exclaimed when he woke up after a sound sleep (without consuming these pills) for the first time in many years!

Of the many people who helped in taking care of Mukulji’s health, I find the contribution of Dr Ramchandra Paaturkar, Dr Suhas Pingle, Dr Vijay Pokle and Dr Avinash Bhondve significant. Besides them, the medicines from Ramdev Baba’s ‘Patanjali Yogpeeth’ have also been beneficial and helpful.

However, ‘Mission Mukul’ became a success due to the cooperation extended to us by none other than Mukulji himself! With no hesitation or complaints, he accepted all the changes in his routine and happily gave up all that he was used to doing till then. For example, in one of the ‘rehab’, he was asked to consume a sleeping pill that was so strong that no doctor would ever recommend it to anyone! When I asked my family doctor about it, he said that the tablet was so harmful that Mukulji could have lost the ability to recognise anyone around him.

Whose decision was it to make Mukulji consume such dangerous tablets? With whose consent or permission was this decision taken? Who wanted to make Mukulji undergo a soporific effect, and for what reason?

Apart from this, because of his irregular eating habits, Mukulji suffered from acidity, and he had to consume one tablet to that effect every morning. However, a daily dose of *kokum* sherbet completely diminished this problem. In fact, at one point in time, his bag was filled with all sorts of antibiotics and allopathic tablets. He had developed a tendency of consuming these tablets and obtaining temporary relief from small disorders like a headache, body ache and indigestion to major transmissible diseases. As he had nobody’s company, he had to rely on either a doctor or these tablets!

Whenever he fell ill, he had made it a point to gulp a tablet and feel better. For most of the times, he was without proper shelter and wanted to rush to his next concert destination. But this resulted in an increased intake of Allopathic tablets in his body. And this was when his food intake was limited. In fact, he used to fast for as long as fourteen days in a month and on rest of the days he used to eat whatever came his way. All this affected his health very badly.

But when he came here, he had to quit almost all the Allopathic tablets, and most of his fasts also came to an end. Also, he consciously began to avoid certain

‘friends’ who had gossiped about him behind his back, and this solved more than 90% of his life's problems.

However, what helped him the most was his regular gym sessions, yoga sessions and a daily intake of Ayurvedic medicines. It helped him recover and build back his nervous system which had gone under the influence of alcohol. Now, he has stopped the intake of allopathic medicines, and he also does not feel the need to consume alcohol. These days, he is neither lost in his world nor is he restless!

As things were back on track and Mukulji was fit and healthy, I thought that he should now have a house to stay! Though he had adjusted himself nicely in our house, his establishment will allow him the freedom for his daily *riyaaz*, conduct workshops and meet friends and well-wishers. Likewise, I bought a nearby bungalow on lease for him. ‘Anish’ - this bungalow - was built in a quiet place, and it had a separate courtyard and a spacious parking place. On the ground floor, it had an expansive hall with attached toilets. The two bedrooms, hall and kitchen on the first floor was where we arranged Mukulji’s new house, and on the second floor, we reserved the similar space for his students who could stay there and learn from him by the *Gurukul* method! The ground floor was perfect for his *Swar Shastra* workshops. Very soon, ‘Anish’ welcomed his new students. Some stayed there, whereas some came to study, but did not stay.

For the first couple of days, *Baba* stayed with Mukulji at ‘Anish’ whereas I used to visit there before leaving for and after coming back from office to cook food for him. Though it was a tiring experience for me, I was happy that my efforts were bearing fruits.

We were now planning to start the workshops. Meanwhile, *Baba* was in our native village for some days. But my visits to ‘Anish’ continued. His students, who came to stay with him, used to take a break of two days to visit their home. On one such day, I paid a visit to him in the evening. One of his students had come with his family to meet Mukulji. We chatted till late night, and finally, it was the time to leave. “Today I will practice living alone”, Mukulji told me. That was his first time living alone. After coming home, I called him again, and we chatted for some more time. He was very relaxed.

However, we did not wake up to a pleasant morning! Our phone rang, and Mukulji’s neighbours were on the line. We could not believe what we had heard! There was a criminal attempt on Mukulji, and on hearing this, we immediately rush to ‘Anish.’ Five hundred rupee notes lay scattered in the courtyard of the bungalow. And a little ahead, Mukulji lay unconscious. People had assembled around him, and despite several attempts, Mukulji was not gaining consciousness.

“Pappa...”, I shouted in deep pain, to which he responded. We then rushed him to the doctor, where he stitched his wound.

But we were pained with these developments. As we were coming back from the doctor, Milind declared, “From now Mukulji will never leave our house. If he feels the need to move out of the house and live independently, we will see it then.”

Finally, after a few months, we let go ‘Anish.’ Had we dug deeper into this incident and approached the police, some of the prominent musicians would have had their career finished.

Now it has been more than three years that this great maestro is living with us. He has the liberty to sing whenever he wishes to! After all, for a maestro of his stature, every unit of time, every *prahar* is auspicious to sing! Apart from our house in Pune, Mukulji has now developed an affectionate relationship with our native village, Achra in the Sindhudurga district of Maharashtra. At Achra, he not only loves spending time at our house but also likes to visit ‘*Swapnagandha*’, a building that once hosted an ancestral grocery store and a wholesale business of perfumes.

All those who know ‘*Spandankar*’ Mrs Pratibha Achrekar, the poetess, will know how she has taught all of us, her children to love everyone unconditionally! However, not only Baba, I and Milind, but even our relatives, friends and neighbours occupy a special place in Mukulji’s new world which now has no room for any disappointment! Sandeep, who is like our brother, and his wife Neha both are also emotionally attached to him and care for him just like us. Their children, Veda and Durvang, are always seen playing with him. Seema and Arvind, Nanu and Kalpana, Archana, Baablya, Gurudas, people on whom we can rely for anything, have developed an emotional attachment to him. Not only do they care for him, but they also readily arrange everything and anything that he needs. Mukulji also has reciprocated by establishing a strong emotional connection and involvement in every one of them.

Apart from developing and nurturing relations with us ‘humans’, Mukulji has also raised three cats - Bablu, Buntly and Chikat - like his children! He has also raised a cow in his native state of Madhya Pradesh, and she will soon join us to be a part of our family.

Mukulji has immense faith in Shridev Rameshwar. Shri. Kanvinde, one of the main Purohits of Rameshwar and the principal trustee of the institution, stands firmly and continuously extends his support to him. Once he is at Achra, he is seen wandering at the beach, at the riverside, on the road or in the temple premises. The elders in the village call him Mukul, the young call him *Papa*, whereas those of his

age call him *Dada*. So strong is their attachment to him that if it rains while he is walking on the road, eight to ten people immediately rush towards him to hold an umbrella over his head!

Mukulji has many dreams for a bright future of Indian Classical Raag Music. We established the *Gandharva Sabha* to help me achieve those dreams. In fact, we have vowed to complete these dreams and Shri. Pravin Kanvinde, the permanent trustee of GSB Temple Trust, is the President of the *Sabha*.

We believe that Shri Rameshwar has his blessings for Mukulji. He has showered roses in his life, which was till now spent walking on thorns! “ I never imagined that my life would someday blossom like this”, he sometimes says.

A lot has been said about him in the print and social media. But it was either a half-truth or full of lies. The problem was that people reached conclusions about Mukulji as a person only from the limited observations they had of him! He was described by many adjectives; some called him saintly, while some others described him as a *Fakir*. For some, he was a sage indulged in contemplation, whereas for some others he was a *sanyasi*, someone who had renounced the world! However, the straightforwardness in us the ‘Achrekars’ make us reject and refuse this completely! How fair is it to brand a human with such adjectives and not allow him to lead a normal life? Will you force the living of a *Jogi* on a small child if an elflock is spotted in his hair?

Many years back, things were said about Mukulji in bad taste and with malicious intent. “The sufferings in Mukul’s life should stop. He is increasingly neglected! When will all this stop?” my mother used to say! However, today all that has stopped.

We have managed to stop his wanderings that were a result of the many sufferings he underwent. However, in his constant pursuit of searching newer paths in music, *Gandharva Sabha* is like a resting place for Mukulji, albeit temporary! His wanderings have stopped, but not his travel. The hardships and pain in his life have stopped, but not his hard work. The phase of his downfall has come to an end, but not his rise.

We all are yet to witness his real spell. Musical regions like that of Salzberg in Austria are eager to welcome him. He still has power in his wings to reach the sky. This *Gandharva* still has a lot of *Amrit* in his voice to make his concerts an unforgettable experience for all of us! And he will not sit still and will soon begin his journey ahead. It is a pause before he moves forward to scale another glorious peak! A halt, in a long *vilambit alaap*!

A gentle pause in his whirls around music!

