

south asian music and dance

# Pulse

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Ten years of Pagrav

**kadam** connecting  
soul, dance and music communities

us: 'When you are performing, it's the music you are highlighting here, not you...' If I can share how I have been touched by this music, if people can appreciate the little nuances and sensitivity of this music, then I would not ask anything more."

"IT'S CLASSIC  
NOT MASSIVE"

Later I speak with Mita Nag, probably double the age of Naik, yet her voice brims with the energy and enthusiasm of a young girl. One question about the Bishnupur gharana, to which she belongs, yields a lengthy musical response - "da-diri-diri-dah-dah-diri-diri-dah..." she sings brightly. Like Naik, her childhood in 1970s Kolkata was rich with art, but a little more focused. With her family belonging to a six-generation lineage of sitar players, music was a constant presence.

STUDENT  
AGED  
TO 70

She recalls that "the TV set had not yet arrived in Kolkata houses at that time, so people often enjoyed live concerts in and around Kolkata. All-nighters were very common. Some of the finest musicians lived in our neighbourhood, and there was a real feeling of brotherhood, of community, warmth and love. The musicians were not so overtly professional as they are nowadays. They would come over to each other's house and play and chat for hours."

DH

BISHNUPUR  
GHARANA

Her grandfather, Sangeetacharya Gokul Nag, kept one eye on her as she undertook initial training with her mother at the age of 5. She learned on a toy-size sitar, which one of the great sarod makers of Kolkata had gifted her father, Pt. Manilal Nag, and quickly graduated to learn with her father at the age of 7. "There were no electronic devices and nothing was written down. It was only through listening that I remembered the exercises he gave me - it was all *shruti*. I just had to keep it all in my mind and keep on practising till my next lesson."

EMPTY  
THE ME  
EXPER



I ask if she was aware that she had a natural gift, or was it just expected that she would follow in her father's footsteps? "No, it wasn't just a way of life, and neither was it being imposed on me just because it was the family tradition. Even when I was a toddler I used to go to the classroom of my dad and sit very quietly, listening without stirring the least – I think I had an inborn love for music, otherwise I could not have been playing till this day."

As she grew into her late teens, she was stretched in a way that few young musicians today have the opportunity to experience: "...all these great tabla maestros used to visit our home and do this riyaz with my dad. He would call me to his practice room and ask me to sit and follow him. I had to do all sorts of mental exercises, and sometimes he would just stop and say 'Well, now you just play a spontaneous *tihai* from this point', or he would say 'I'm coming back in ten minutes, you just keep practising with him...' I would feel so nervous and shy and wouldn't know what to do! But those few years of rigorous following really gave me the vision that one should have to become a full professional musician. In my dad's days it was the vogue that when there was a young brilliant musician coming up, the elderly maestros used to encourage and provide opportunities. Today these opportunities are very restricted to some very prestigious institutions and organisations. Highly-talented students who don't come from an affluent background and who aren't connected in the music world find it very hard to get good opportunities. I feel very sad about it."

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She has spent her life pursuing 'parallel careers' as she puts it - decades as an English teacher, while also teaching music, and performing, often with her father in duets, all over the world. She is hopeful for the future, especially for keeping the less-heard Bishnupur gharana alive, but is frustrated with the attitude towards classical music of the powers that be: "It's classical, not massical! Something which is classical can never be meant for the masses - whatever is popular is meant for the masses. But perhaps classical music could reach out to a greater population than it currently does. Even the Indian central government does very little to promote classical music in social media, broadcasting etc., for prime slots. No one wishes to sponsor the artists because the reception is limited to a smaller percentage of the population." To this end, she teaches vigorously, her students are aged from 7 to 70 years old and she loves to stay connected with the younger generation.

For her first concert at Darbar, she hopes to present some rare ragas of the Dhrupad-based Bishnupur gharana, and speaks vibrantly of its emphasis on the meditative experience: "It's a kind of divine communion - after the recital the audience should feel bathed in an aura of peace, love and... sunshine... it's not a state of momentary excitement or celebration, we just try to delve deep into the expression of the raga - we try to invoke it on the stage like a deity, with a unique personality and character."

*shruti*: a microtone. There are twenty-two in an octave.  
*tihai*: repetition of a phrase or rhythmic pattern three times, often concluding a section.

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