

MeerD

Musical Connections

OCTOBER 2012

INSIDE



A CLASS ACT



TO *A Walk
TO REMEMBER!*

TRACKING TALES



OLD WINE, NO BOTTLE



AND MUCH MORE...

MIXING BUSINESS WITH *Pleasure*

In conversation with the founder of Taal Incorporated Varun Venkit, **Gandhaar Amin** discovers that if an artiste thinks out of the box and plays the cards right, he won't have to slog it out to earn a living out of his music, and art and dough will no longer be strangers!

Photographs by *Aabha Chaubal*



You don't call it work when you enjoy what you're doing, they say. However, in India, it's a drill etched in our minds that you cannot possibly pursue an art professionally unless you're the best in town.

Otherwise, it's all but a lost cause. Even if you happen to be a prodigy, the society has hammered into your head that unless you want to face a life of extreme hardships, you should probably play safe, get a good degree and find a job in an established company. We have been conditioned to think of art and money as antonyms.

Having said that, it would also be unfair to blame the parents entirely for dissuading their kids from choosing an art as a profession. For the bitter truth is, that while an engineer or an architect of mediocre skills can easily live a comfortable life, a professional artiste needs to be nothing less of a wunderkind to make ends meet in the ruthless, yet enticing world of art. For, let's face it, who would shell out Rs 1000 for a ticket of a not too well-known musician's concert? Of course, that hardly entails that India cannot generate good artistes. We take great pride in being a culturally rich society. Then how do we stop from letting all that wealth go waste? How are young, aspiring artistes supposed to survive in this country?



The answer lies in making music a business. It's a myth that art and business do not go together. If a doctor, with the noblest profession in the lot, can set up a hospital to make money as well as to help his patients, without forgetting his moral principles, why can't an artiste take the same road, without compromising on his art?

So the real question here is: How does an artiste stick to his creative principles and still earn enough to be able to live a comfortable life? Well, here's a young musician who has accomplished exactly that!

About two years ago, **Varun Venkit**, a freelance drummer, started a company called Taal Inc. He is now a respected musician as well as entrepreneur who not only runs a successful business venture, but does it without commercialising music or making it into a circus! Varun shares his story with Meend – a story that has the potential to motivate music hopefuls to follow in his footsteps and look at music as an entity with an eclectic scope, that goes beyond the age-old framework of concerts, albums or providing playback for Bollywood!

How was your life as a musician before the birth of Taal Inc.?

My first memory of drumming... Well that's a tough one. My father used to play the drums in college and he taught me some rhythms. I used to practise them on my thighs whenever I got bored, because I did not have a drum set of my own. Finally, I decided to learn the art from a professional, and that is when I met Zubin Balsara – probably the most influential teacher I've had the pleasure of being under the tutelage of. He introduced me to many other percussion instruments, which opened up a whole new world of rhythm for me!

At that point, it was still a hobby as I still had plans of becoming a doctor. (smirks) But a year later, I realised I was getting pretty good at drumming. As fate would have it, just right then, Zubin took a break, went to the US, got married, and did not really have time to teach anymore. Determined not to abandon this newly-discovered passion

halfway, I started learning from Sanjiv Pankar, who was kind enough to lend me his drums. Gradually, I started playing with some local bands, and realised I was having a lot of fun. I even played at places wherein I wasn't legally allowed to enter (winks).

So when did you decide that music was what you wanted to pursue all your life?

I don't really remember getting an epiphany that elicited an 'aha'. It was a pretty slow process. I was into some serious drumming and fortunately, my parents were really supportive. They wanted me to get a degree though, so I started studying psychology. Around this time, I was introduced to the unique concept of Drum Circle Facilitation by Zubin – which is basically all about understanding people and communicating with them through the expressive medium

of music. I started assisting Zubin in his work and my psychology course ended up aiding this activity. Serendipity, eh! I guess it was around this time that I realised THIS was what I want to do. Don't get me wrong – I already knew I wanted to pursue music as a profession but with this new-found perspective, I developed a wider understanding of the work prospects that came under the umbrella of music.

When did the idea of Taal Inc. first conjure up in your mind?

In 2005, but initially, it was just a rhythm and percussion band. At that time I had absolutely no idea that learning psychology would benefit my career in music in any way. We put up our

first show Percussionitis in 2006. But soon after that, around the end of 2006, my stint with Agnee happened and Taal Inc took a backseat. Playing with the biggest band in Pune was inexplicably overwhelming!

By then, I had finished my masters, and the burden of having to survive by myself had started gnawing me. The time had come to make a conscious choice between psychology and music in my life-path. Even then, Taal Inc. was still making furtive appearances in my mind, as if it were trying to tell me something. And in a flash, I realised that I could put my qualifications in both, psychology and music to use in a brilliant way, via therapy, community exercises as also corporate solutions. That was when the objective of Taal Inc. as we see it today dawned upon me for the first time in its entirety and glory.

What gave you the motivation to take it ahead seriously?



I was playing with Agnee at the time, touring all around the country, earning more than enough, and living the 'rockstar' life! But there was this subtle, continually unnerving disconnect with myself at the mental level. There was restlessness in me that I had to address. So one fine day, I decided to call it quits and follow my heart's instincts. I left Agnee and decided to put my money where my mouth was. But it was only at a fateful three-month sabbatical in Singapore, that I actually got down to business and I have the legendary Mamady Keita to thank! I met him during my trip, and it completely changed my life. I had been playing a bit of djembe but when I saw Keita play, I was blown off my mind! I came back to India all charged-up, started teaching the djembe to some of my drumming students, formed the rhythm ensemble, and also took up drum circle facilitation for various groups in this part of the globe.

How did this small idea grow into a big time company that it is now?

Oh, the very first enquiry I got was for a drum circle for 1000 people! It was like a rookie being thrown into the ring to fight against a world champion! I borrowed money from my dad, some of which I still have to return, (grins) and bought some 1200 drums, along with other equipment. For assistance, I only had Solonie, who was then, just a friend casually helping me out. I used to pay her a minuscule amount or treat her to dinner and in turn, she would help me run the business. One day, I asked her if she wanted to join full-time and she said yes! (Solonie Singh Pathania is now a director at Taal Inc.)



The business was growing, but at a slow pace. A few months later, my best friend Janak came on board as well. I suddenly became conscious of the fact that while it was just my life that I had been playing with till then, now there were two more people depending on me. One wrong decision and I could spoil not one, but three futures! That was a tough feeling to fight.

However, my worries vanished when Janak applied all of his 'UK Business School' ideas to Taal Inc, and the picture changed drastically! He started running it like a hardcore business – something I would never have been able to do. He made business plans, divided work between the three of us, and miraculously enough, Taal Inc started growing at an amazing rate! That was also when we set up our office.

Where does Taal Inc. stand today, and where do you see it ten years from now?

We now have four verticals – the rhythm ensemble, drum circles, talent management, and corporate research and training. We have also started working on a school of rhythm, which should be up and running in a year. Playing traditional African music in a contemporary setting brings a freshness and novelty to our rhythm ensemble, which, though still in a nascent stage, has managed to pick up quickly. For artiste management, we're getting into the Indian Classical music scene, where this concept is new. We are now slowly reaching a stage where we can stop thinking about money and do what we feel is right.

What do you think you learnt from this whole experience? Do you think you made any compromises?

I think it gave me a lot of strength and confidence, which I would never have acquired just being a drummer. Running a business taught me how to connect with people and manage resources. At the same time, I think life would have been much easier had I just stayed a performer. What I'm doing right now will show results only after a few years, as against my fellow musicians who are just performers but have reached places already. Right now this may seem like a compromise, but I'm sure I wouldn't feel so ten years down the line. Besides, I have my friends who run the company, whilst I lock myself up in a room and just drum for hours at end till my hands turn sore, face flushed and heart content.

OLD WINE, NO BOTTLE

When Aabha Chaubal and Sahil Bhattad set out with a simple aim to capture the antique musical offerings at the city's oldest music stores on their lens, little did they know their visits were to unveil quite a few poignant tales behind the fate of each - some seemed indefatigable, others not so much .





It started out as a romantic idea - to do a photo feature on vintage music stores, revisiting the era of scattered records, dusty shelves, an old man with a warm, welcoming smile, who had a story to tell and records to sell. There were myriad tales behind those stacks of musical treasures, waiting to be told, just not the kinds we had expected to hear! Having tracked down some of the oldest music stores in Pune, we set out to visit them and interview the owners. Each store had a unique dimension to add to our perspective. While some were flourishing and some were just about managing, there were also a few that were on the verge of shutting down.

Our journey began from the 46-year-old Pankaj Music store, located in the heart of the city. With a wide range of audio CDs, MP3s, DVDs, Blue Rays and LP records in classical music, ghazals, Marathi music and movies they also sell electronic equipments related to music like record players, music systems, stereos, woofers and karaoke machines. They don't have branches anywhere else in India, yet boast of a very wide clientele from all over the world.



The owner, Mukund Parmar believes the reason their business is still in shape, in the face of challenges posed by increasing piracy and technological advances, is that they have consistently served their customers with good and reliable products. Parmar is gifted with the maturity of a businessman to adapt to the changing technological trends and an impeccable foresight about music that will sell in future.

Similar was the case with the next store we visited located off MG road. Oceanic Sound and Vision is one of the oldest stores in Pune, known for its beautiful collection of old western classics. The owner, Mahendra Dave, whose father established the first music store in Pune in 1930 — Empire Music House, is a soft-spoken old man who is truly passionate about the music he sells. He too, thinks nothing of the piracy piracy for he believes it will never affect the ‘quality music’ available in his own store. Now that’s a true example of a music store that has stood the test of time.



The next place we visited stands in the antique atmosphere of Sadashiv Peth - a small, charming music store that goes by the name of Friend's Music Centre. As we walked in, we were greeted by big glass shelves for walls, stacked neatly with what looked like age-old cassettes. We literally found ourselves surrounded by a musical fortune, enclosed in clouded cassette cases with patiently handwritten lists of their contents. This store, initially run by Prabhakar Ketkar, was started in the year 1952 as a music store and more importantly as an audio library. From an extensive collection of fourteen to fifteen thousand records, people had the option to listen to their favourite tracks for merely two paise per song.



Connoisseurs could enjoy their hand-picked music locked up in a sound-proof cabin, without having to bear the expenses of pricy record players. Unfortunately this service had to be discontinued since 1985 due to financial reasons. “In this age of piracy, sustaining merely as a music retailer is very difficult. That is why I learnt audio recording and started my own studio in the place of the music library”, says the current enthusiastic owner Harshwardhan Ketkar, the son of Prabhakar Ketkar.



Moving towards the busy streets of Fergusson College Road, a modest music store that hides behind a commercial complex opposite the famous Goodluck Cafe, known as Thakkar's Music Bank was our next destination. This store was conceived 25 years ago when Chandrakant and Rashmi Thakkar broke away from their family business of recycling newspapers to start their own enterprise, something that they both love to do, something that they are both passionate about. After posing for some photographs the humble couple sat us down to narrate their story. It was a lot of hard work, they said, understanding the market, the taste of the audience, predicting the products that will sell and keeping up with ever evolving technology. After proudly speaking of the celebrated days of their store, Thakkar earnestly admitted that the piracy has taken a rather heavy toll on their business. In addition to that, with both their sons having settled abroad, the future of their store remains a prevailing concern. In spite of all these difficulties however, the couple has a strong resolve to go on for as long as they can. They continue to survive on their loyal customer base that turns to them to quench their musical thirst. "We never get window shoppers," stated Rashmi Thakkar with pride, "Every person who comes to our doorstep knows exactly what he wants and is confident that he will get it here."

The final store on our list was Gopi's Music Centre in Narayan Peth. Our romantic ideas of a music store were severely shattered by the facade of this one. Much to our bewilderment, the place to which we were directed, turned out to be a kitchenware store. To clear the confusion we asked the person at the counter if we were at the right place. He pointed towards a narrow staircase in the store and his brother, Nakul Karde, led us to the attic which is what is now left of the famous Gopi Music Centre. Its austere appearance made it look like a private collection of an individual rather than a music store. After walking us through the two tiny rooms that hold a very limited stock of music, Nakul confessed that the store was indeed in a difficult state. It was evident from his apologetic demeanour that he wants to do his best to



revive the legacy created by his father, but doesn't know how to fight the mighty giant of piracy. He reminisced how successful the store was when his father started it in 1981 and how their customers still include the likes of Prabhakar Jog, Subodh Bhave, Sandeep Khare and Saleel Kulkarni. But the harsh truth still remains that the fate of this store is hanging by a thread.

While we saw some stores that could survive the storm of piracy without major glitches, or some that have managed through it by coupling their sales with other business ventures, we also saw some that run a real threat of closing down. What started as a casual, light photo feature ended on a rather painful note. That music in future might exist only in the form of digital files on computers, that music might not have a tangible interface in a few decades, that our future generations might not understand the romance that lies in collecting old cassettes and records, is a thought that left a rather bitter aftertaste in our minds.

ACLASSACT

The annual Guru Pournima programme of any music class paints a colourful picture of the hard work that goes into the making of an artiste and the beautiful relationship between a Guru and disciple.

Sahil Bhattad revisits his experience at one of these close-knit, achingly innocent affairs.

Class Photographs by *Sohum Bilawal* | Meera Tai's Photograph by *Ashwini Kulkarni*

On a drizzly Friday evening, I was bored stiff at home with a few hours to kill, when I remembered a friend's invitation to her annual class performance which was to take place that day. I deliberated on whether to go or not. The thing about these functions is that they mostly tend to be like school gatherings where the only excited members of the audience are the performers' parents! So although the prospect didn't sound too appealing, I thought I should give it a shot – to support my friend. "How bad could it be?" I reasoned with myself. I decided to attend only her performance and discreetly leave. Little did I know then, that the next four hours of listening to amateur singers were to bring me the most intimate musical experience of my life!

As I made my way through a tiny lane leading to the venue, I was greeted by the serene sounds of the *tanpura* emanating from a quaint little bungalow, aptly named 'Hansadhwani'. I entered and, as was customary, washed my feet before proceeding to the living room. All the furniture was pushed against the walls to make room for the proud parents. There was no stage; instead a special mattress was laid out for the performers. In a humble attempt to make the gathering seem as professional as possible, microphones were arranged and well-known tabla and harmonium artistes were invited to accompany the students.



I settled down on the carpet. A student was getting ready to perform. She communicated with the accompanying artistes and closed her eyes to concentrate. Two faces in the room caught my eye – the Guru's, Meera Panshikar, and the performer's mother's. Both these women were proud to see their daughter (for Meera *tai*, her students are nothing less of her own children) on the stage. The student began with an *alaap*, her eyes still shut. Only after completing the introductory *alaap*, did she open her eyes slowly to look at her Guru, Meera Tai, who smiled faintly. She made a few mistakes in the course of her performance but also managed to elicit some *wah*'s from the audience. Every time she realised she had gone off-key or missed the beat, she instinctively looked at her Guru apologetically as though to say "I won't let it happen again." The mother's countenance didn't change throughout the performance. She was so engrossed in her silent prayers that it seemed as though she was oblivious to her daughter's performance itself! It was only when the room resounded with applause that she was jolted back to reality from her trance and a smile spread on her face, unwittingly.

The next student was to perform a *tarana* in Raga Yaman. She touched her Guru's feet and made her way to the microphone. She began confidently, inviting a lot of *kya baat hai*'s. She shyly responded to these words of adulation and concluded in three minutes. Meera Tai was happy but clearly not content. She was about to intervene when an old woman in the audience shouted, "Let her sing another song." It was evident from the student's sheepish expressions that the woman



was her grandmother and she wished her ‘Aiji’ hadn’t spoken out. Knowing she couldn’t say no, she took two minutes to think and decided upon a *bandish*. Her confident rendition again impressed the audience. As she progressed, the tabla artiste, who also seemed pleased with her technique, introduced some complexities in his routine. Realising what was happening, she could only smile helplessly at her plight. She kept throwing pleading glances at the tabla artiste, urging him to keep it simple but he was having too much fun. Abruptly, she stopped and said, “I don’t remember the next stanza!”

The audience, though amused, couldn’t guess how the Guru was going to react. There was a pin drop silence. The Guru looked at her student and unable to control herself, burst into a gale of laughter. The other students, fully aware that it could have also happened to them, quickly prompted the lyrics. To avoid any further goof-ups, she smartly ended her performance with the quintessential *tihai*.



Thereafter, there was a short coffee break. One by one, Meera Panshikar spoke to all the parents. One of them asked her if she’d like to rent a hall next year, to which she promptly said, “No, there is a reason why I conduct these programmes around Guru Pournima at my own residence. This house was built 25 years ago, when I was learning music from Kishoritai (Amonkar). One day, she said – ‘Meera, I haven’t gifted you anything for your new home. I’ve decided now, I want to give you my voice. I will perform at your place. Only those who really understand music will be present. I will select my audience; no one else should be there.’ She handpicked 105 people including P L Deshpande, S M Joshi and H K Firodia. On August 18, 1987, she performed in this very living room. She sat exactly where all my students sit today and sang for four hours straight. There was such power and passion in her voice that all present will agree it was her best performance. My house, each and every corner, is soaked in her mellifluous voice. I couldn’t have asked for a better gift...”

After reveling in this charming anecdote, it was time to get back to the performances. Up next was one of Meera Tai’s very few male students. His formal attire, the laptop bag on his shoulders and the I-card around his neck suggested he had come directly from work. He settled behind the microphone, bowed to his Guru and started off with a disclaimer - “I’m singing after a gap of five months so kindly bear with me.” He began singing *Bhairav* and it became evident that his disclaimer was no joke. He struggled throughout the performance and kept looking at Meera Tai nervously. At one point, Meera Tai started singing with him to bring him back on track. The confidence that his Guru showed in him kept him going. At

the end, Meera Tai said a few kind words about him – something she didn’t do for everybody. As he sat next to his wife, I noticed how happy and proud she looked. She had recorded her husband’s performance on her phone. It didn’t matter to her that he had made mistakes. For her, it was just perfect.

It was finally my friend’s turn. I’ve known her for over four years and we’ve spent hours discussing music. She is the one who initiated me into Indian classical music. I had never seen her perform in front of an audience but I was soon going to find out how gifted a singer she was. She began with such formidable determination that I couldn’t help wondering if she had rehearsed it. Since this genre is improvisational, such confidence from a student, is awe inspiring. She took her time with the *alaap* (her favourite part of a raga) and languorously set the mood of *Jaunpuri*. Deeply immersed in the *raga*, she didn’t respond to the appreciation that came her way quite early. She weaved her way to the *bandish* and I couldn’t believe how beautiful a performer she had transformed into. She had always known her limitations as a singer and now in addition she had learned to highlight her strength – her ability to emote through every single note. She managed to get the entire audience involved. She met the sam with such childlike happiness that it was impossible not to smile and join in her reverie. Her eyes shining with glee, her hand gestures and the nod of her head at having successfully fit the *bandish* in the constraints of the *taal* seemed to be saying “see what I did there”. The audience also swayed their hands and flicked their heads with her. She instructed the tabla artiste to increase the tempo a little bit and managed to keep the audience engaged even in that lay. Motivated, she asked him to increase it a tad more but in his excitement, he went a bit too far. She tried to negotiate when her Guru dismissed her attempts and only said “You can do it. Sing.” She fumbled a couple of times. One could see her frustration mounting. The third time around, as though to rub it in the tabla artiste’s face, she nailed it! The audience unanimously erupted in a *wah*. Not sure whether she’ll be able to continue, she wrapped up her performance.

It had already gotten late so I congratulated my friend, thanked her Guru for allowing me in this very intimate *mehfil* and took off. As I drove back home, I realised how beautifully innocent the past few hours had been. Many artistes and patrons of classical music, alike, have an air about themselves. Their demeanour conveys these unspoken ‘rules’ about the strictly ‘formal’ relation between them and the audience. But there was no place for these trivialities at this class performance. At Hansadhwani, the audience isn’t invited to judge the performers, but to motivate them. Mistakes aren’t deemed blasphemous but considered as scope for improvement. Students don’t compete but look out for each other. They timidly look at their Guru not for appreciation but for approval. The Guru scolds them not to punish them but to protect. At Hansadhwani, it is the journey that matters, not the destination.

TRACKING TALES

Think 60's, and if you happen to be a lover of the classics, chances are the first thing to pop into your head is *The Beatles*. Led by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, this legendary band was hugely responsible for a psychedelic rock movement in that era. Probably the most heard-band in the history of music, *The Beatles* had a lot of quirky anecdotes attached to their songs.

One story that has become famous over the years involves the making of their hit number *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* from the album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, released in 1967. It was a period when drugs had become a rage, and *The Beatles* were especially renowned for the subtle undertones of drug-use in their songs. Immediately after the album was released, 'geniuses' deciphered the code in *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* – the initials spelt LSD! Until then Lennon had never publicly admitted to doing drugs, but the catch here was *The Beatles'* total denial of this obvious hint. Lennon had a different story to tell – apparently his son Julian came home one day with a drawing in his hand. Julian had made a sketch of his friend Lucy amidst lots of stars. When Lennon asked his son what it meant, he simply said "It's called '*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*'." The name had an interesting ring to it so it stuck with Lennon and later ended up inspiring him to write a song using it!

In numerous interviews after that, Lennon maintained he was unaware that the song's initials spelt LSD until someone pointed it out to him a couple of weeks after the release. While the song is extremely trippy, with the use of different time-signatures and bizarre lyrics, Lennon always denied it of being a deliberate hint towards using LSD. However, the other all-important member of the band, Paul McCartney, made many contradictory revelations over the years. McCartney stated in a TV show once, "Sgt. Pepper was an album produced because of drugs." When asked by the interviewer if the band members were constantly under the influence of drugs, he replied nonchalantly, "Yes, we were."

Lucy O'Donnell, the little girl who inspired the song, had no idea that she held a special place in the history of *The Beatles*, until she turned 13. Later, she gave many interviews where she said though she did not particularly like the song, she distinctly remembered Julian intently working on that later-immortalised drawing! Lucy died three years ago of a severe illness. The cool part is, Lucy, who was an absolute commoner, became a small-time celebrity because of this story!



"Picture yourself in a boat on a river,
With tangerine trees and marmalade skies
Somebody calls you, you answer quite slowly,
A girl with kaleidoscope eyes.
Cellophane flowers of yellow and green,
Towering over your head.
Look for the girl with the sun in her eyes,
And she's gone.
Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Lucy in the sky with diamonds
Ahh..."

- Gandhaar Sangoram

A Walk TO REMEMBER!

Chalte Chalte- Pakeezah

One day during a candid chat with some friends over pizza, we started playing the ‘which’ game, where everyone asks one ‘which’ question and the rest of the group has to answer. So a gamut of typical questions like, “Which Hollywood would you like to date?” or “Name one life-changing event” were thrown my way. My friend Ashwini came up with, “Which is the one song, that if sung to you in all earnest, will serenade you off your feet?” All of us went into introspective silence. A couple of minutes later, I had my answer - *Chalte Chalte yunhi koi mil gaya tha* from Pakeezah. I couldn’t explain at that moment, why it was that song that won the roulette in my mind, but since that day I’ve been pondering about it. And each time, I sense this exhilaration that I love to revel in. Just writing about it gives me a heady rush.

Legend has it that the tragedy in Meena Kumari’s real life involving her estranged husband Kamal Amrohi takes this song beyond its framework of notes to reveal an underlying story. This song tells you this story - not metaphorically, nor blatantly; but in glimpses that flash through the song. The yearning of the courtesan transcends into a narrative; a fantasy that takes shape yet remains abstract. A weak dream that flutters in the storm of reality but continues to dimly shine on.

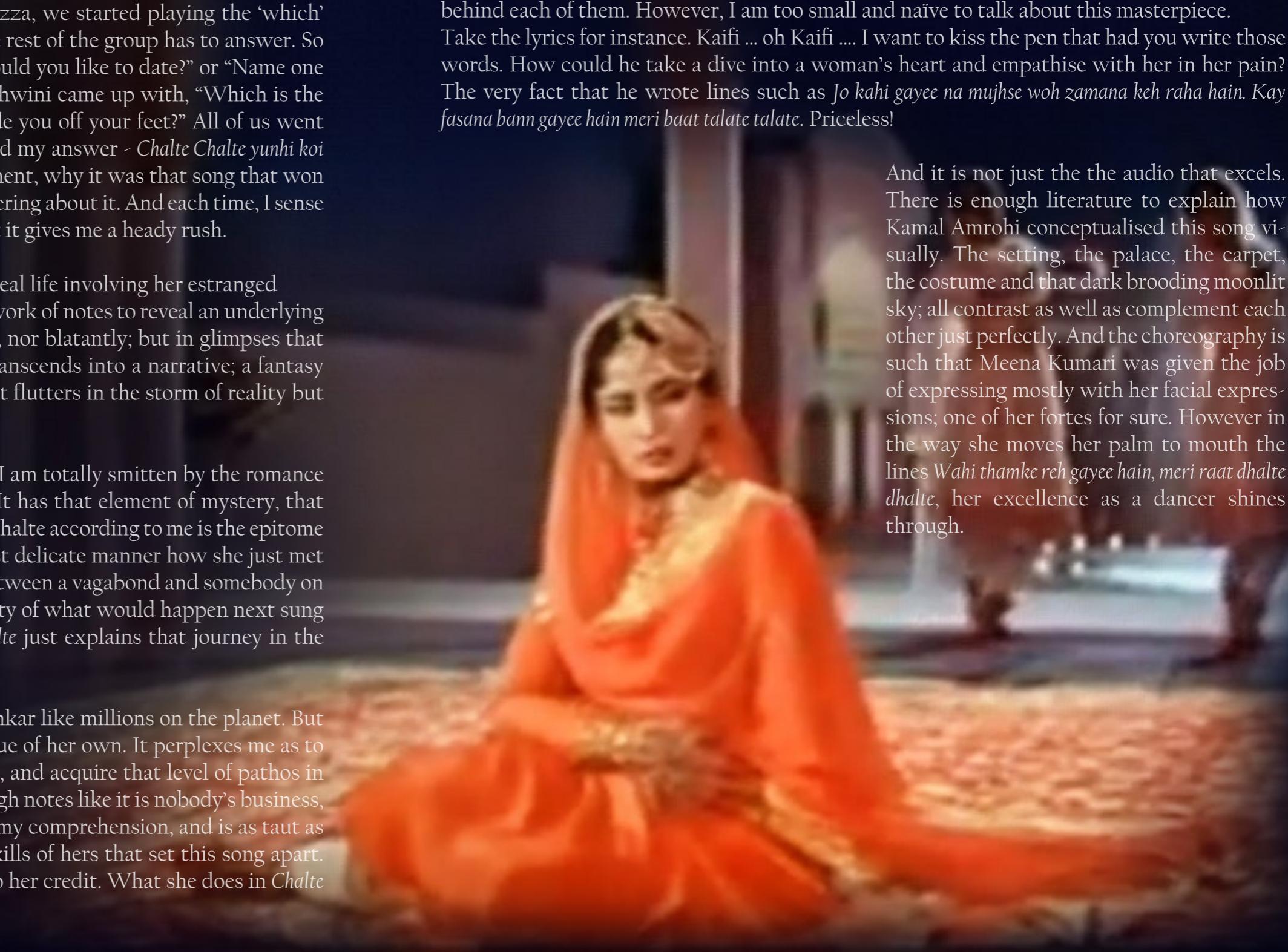
I tend to get melodramatic when I think of this song, for I am totally smitten by the romance that builds up between two people while on a journey. It has that element of mystery, that sense of adventure, that dilution of purpose. And Chalte Chalte according to me is the epitome of such a romance. The lyrics go on to explain in the most delicate manner how she just met someone while she was just ‘on her way’. The romance between a vagabond and somebody on an aimless journey is surreal but beautiful. The uncertainty of what would happen next sung in the lines *Wahi thamke reh gayee hain, meri raat dhalte dhalte* just explains that journey in the most lyrical manner.

I am an unabashedly die-hard fan of Lata Mangeshkar like millions on the planet. But it is *Chalte Chalte* that for me defines Lataji to be in a league of her own. It perplexes me as to how she could empathize with Sahib jaan, the courtesan, and acquire that level of pathos in her voice. She does what she is known best for; hits the high notes like it is nobody’s business, goes into various technical intricacies which are beyond my comprehension, and is as taut as a guitar string in holding her notes. But it is not these skills of hers that set this song apart. For that, we have an *Allah tero naam* or a *Baiyaan na dharo* to her credit. What she does in *Chalte*

Chalte is to hold you in a parallel realm and take you on her journey. For me, it is like walking in a mist simply following her voice.

Another part of it that has been etched in my memory is the many ways she sings the line *Yeh Chiraag bujh rahein hain, mere saath jalta jalate*. It goes low with self-pity, and then it wavers in the middle with mystery, and then rises into a high note with hope. Honest to God, I have the goose bumps as I write this!

I could go on to name a dozen reasons why I love this song. And there are just as many aspects behind each of them. However, I am too small and naïve to talk about this masterpiece. Take the lyrics for instance. Kaifi ... oh Kaifi I want to kiss the pen that had you write those words. How could he take a dive into a woman’s heart and empathise with her in her pain? The very fact that he wrote lines such as *Jo kahi gayee na mujhse woh zamana keh raha hain. Kay fasana bann gayee hain meri baat talate talate*. Priceless!



And it is not just the audio that excels. There is enough literature to explain how Kamal Amrohi conceptualised this song visually. The setting, the palace, the carpet, the costume and that dark brooding moonlit sky; all contrast as well as complement each other just perfectly. And the choreography is such that Meena Kumari was given the job of expressing mostly with her facial expressions; one of her fortés for sure. However in the way she moves her palm to mouth the lines *Wahi thamke reh gayee hain, meri raat dhalte dhalte*, her excellence as a dancer shines through.

The two supporting dancers are very adept and do justice with the right amount of energy to some beautiful Kathak. There is a scene where Meena Kumari moves to the entrance and the camera pans out. As she moves further away exemplifying her pathos, you can see sprinklers come up. Amrohi has taken the camera right through the fountain ending the shot with Meenaji standing behind a curtain of water. Now that is brilliant cinema.

So, get mesmerised by this legendary song, if you haven't already. It is not just a song, or a video, but an unfolding story. It is an ode to an era of cinema that reflects an era of a society. Just like the innumerable memorable lines from the movie to the other beautiful ethereal songs, this is a song that is a jewel in the crown of Indian music.

And it summarises perfectly in its own lines its story *Ke fasana bann gayee hain meri baat talate talate...*

- Bhinoy Japher

MUSIC REVIEW OF THE MONTH



AIYYAA, we love it!

Review – Aiyyaa

Music: Amit Trivedi

Lyrics: Amitabh Bhattacharya

Aiyyaa is a frolicky soundtrack- or WAKDA, as they call it. With the story set in a Marathi background, the rustic flavour of Marathi music has seeped into the soundtrack. That has been the case for quite a few films lately, take for instance Mala Jau De from Ferrari Ki Sawaari, and Amit Trivedi's beautiful number in English Vinglish - another notable soundtrack from the very talented composer.

Sava Dollar from Aiyyaa is a Lavani-textured track, and has got all the Marathi nuances, coupled with Hindi glaze and glamour. The promotions for Aiyyaa started with Dreamum Wakeupum. It is undoubtedly a very catchy number, and Bhattacharya has done a creative job on the lyrics. The song is highly contagious, though it has been labeled as Rani's answer to The Dirty Picture, or musically speaking, Trivedi's rejoinder to Ooh Lala. What To Do is the song to look out for - it is rib-ticklingly hilarious, and Bhattacharya once again comes up with some of the wackiest lyrics we have heard in a while. Thanks to the sexual and seductive undertones, it is sure to become a rage among the youth. Agabai Halla and Wakda continue the fun mood, with Trivedi himself crooning both the quirky numbers. The surprise package though, is Mahek Bhi. It is a trademark Trivedi number, with the placid sound of the shehnai interwoven beautifully along the soulful composition. The song has an unusually long intro, lasting for about a minute and half, after which Shreya Ghoshal magically takes over, and renders the tune as smoothly and langorously as it has been composed.

Overall, the soundtrack is completely hatke- exactly what you expect when the musical phenomenon Amit Trivedi teams up with the man of words Amitabh Bhattacharya!

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