

Tansen, the magnifi

Akbar was keen to have a contest between Tansen and Baiju, but the latter was not excited by the prospect

By Dr K.N. Sharif

who, seeing special aptitude towards music in Tansen, began to train him. Sri Gopal Lal, the adopted son of Baiju Bavara, the first disciple of Swamiji, was also getting training there at the time. Gradually, both Tansen and Gopal Lal became thick friends.

Tansen realized and experienced the immense power, grandeur and depth of music in Baiju Bavara, and which grew in him. One day, he went to the jungle to fetch some firewood for the ashram when suddenly his sight fell over a tree, on the branch of which a light seemed to flicker, that seemed to appear and disappear alternately. He heard some sounds just before the light shone and soon it disappeared. Tansen was astonished to see this mystery.

He went to the ashram and disclosed this mystery to his teacher, Swami Haridas. Swamiji knew this effect of light. He cleared the mystery, saying that light shone due to the effect of Deepak Rag sung by a bird on the trees, and it went out as soon as the bird stopped making the particular sound.

Thereafter, Swamiji taught Deepak Rag to Tansen. After his training in the years 1555-1556 and after mastering many melodies, Tansen returned to his village, Bepat. Having returned home, he searched for Baiju. But he could not get any clue as to his whereabouts. He started to practice music in a music *vidyaperth* in Gawalior founded by Man Singh, Tomer and Baiju.

Meanwhile, his parents passed away. In 1558, Tansen again left Gawalior in search of Baiju. He reached Bandogarh, the capital of Rewa state after some time. The king there was a great patron of music. He took Tansen to his palace and treated him as a brother and made him the chief musician of the palace. He remained there for some time, but soon the memory of Baiju made him restless and under the pretence of winning a music cham-

pionship, he started again on his search for Baiju.

Establishing his superiority in music in state after state, he reached Agra and threw his challenge. Akbar had already heard about the fame of Tansen through Abul Fazal. He was anxious to see and listen to the great musician. He was much pleased on Tansen's arrival. A music concert was organized on the orders of the emperor.

In the programme, the style and voice control of Tansen was very pleasing and attractive, and consequently no singer at the Delhi court dared

invitation. At last, Akbar sent for his mother and asked her to persuade her son to enter the contest. Hearing about Tansen's desire of world recognition in music, Baiju was somewhat hurt and accepted the challenge on condition that the contest should take place in an open space, and no information be given about Baiju to any person except the emperor and the ministers. And thus the contest was organized in a forest near Agra. Baiju appeared with his uncut flowing hair and in torn clothes and took his seat among the multitude, quite unnoticed.

On the order of the emperor, the contest was announced and Tansen started Todi melody. Soon, a herd of deer, having been attracted by the music, arrived there and gathered around Tansen. Tansen put a garland of flowers around the neck of a black deer. As the Raag ended, the herd of deer disappeared into the jungle. Akbar looked towards the court singers, but none dared to sing in the face of Tansen. At last, the emperor looked towards Baiju.

Baiju, modest and selfless, stood before the emperor and admired Tansen's art with all his heart. He announced that he would sing the Mirg Ranjani Todi with the effect of attracting only that deer around whose neck Tansen had put the garland.

Baiju started the Mirg Ranjani Todi (nowadays known as Gujree Todi). Soon, the same deer around whose neck Tansen had put the garland, approached Baiju and sat near him in a hypnotized state. Baiju took off the garland from the deer's neck and put it on the neck of the emperor. Dumbfounded, Tansen continued to stare.

The emperor asked Baiju to start a Raag which Tansen could reply to. Baiju said, "I should start with Malkosh Raag and after melting the rock lying in front, I shall plant it into my Tanpura (musical instrument). After the Raag is over, the molten rock will again become hard. Let Tansen melt the rock again and get it out my Tanpura."



TANSEN: Search for Baiju led him to glory and fame

to show his feat after this. Even the best singer of the Mughal court, Jihan Khan, pretended to be have a stomachache and avoided the contest.

Tansen's challenge to the master of music in the Mughal court in the year 1562, was not taken to undermine the musician. However, Akbar freely admired and accepted the merit and greatness of Tansen's art, which reminded him of Baiju and his skill. A desire to see the magnificent contest between the two great masters arose in Akbar's heart. Akbar tried very hard to invite Baiju for this contest, but Baiju was not willing to accept the

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TANSEN, the great musician, the shining star of the music world whose light illuminates the vast expanse of the universe of music, has given continued inspiration to generations of musicians.

Tansen's father was Makrand Pande, a Gaur Brahmin by caste. He lived in Bepat village, some 25 miles from Gawalior. Makrand Pande and his wife, Kalindi Bai, once went to Assam to pay homage to Kamakhya Devi in the year 1532 A.D. On the return journey, they were blessed with a son who was named Tansukh, which became 'Tanna' in affection.

When the boy grew up, it was felt that he was dumb. His father visited several temples and served many saints, including Swami Haridas of Brindaban. He also used to visit a Sufi saint, Muhammad Ghous of Gawalior, who himself was very unhappy with the boy's malady.

Muhammad Ghous began treating his malady with indigenous herbs, which brought about continued improvement in the voice of the boy. Muhammad Ghous, who was a skillful singer and musician, also trained Tanna in the use of seven vocal sounds.

After very hard practice, Tanna's voice not only improved but also became sweet and melodious, so much so that soon he developed into a singer. Muhammad Ghous used to call Tanna as Tansen in affection.

When Tansen was 12 years old, Muhammad Ghous, with the consent of Makrand Pande, sent him to Swami Haridas of Brindaban in the year 1544,

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Tansen was sitting non-plussed. Baiju started Malkosh Raag and the rock began to melt gradually. Seeing this, Tansen got up and went near Baiju and said, "Respected sir, who are you? My guru had told me that there was a *gurubhai* Baiju who could excel me."

Baiju asked him who his guru was, Tansen referred to his guru Swami Haridas and said that he, Tansen, had started on a search for his *gurubhai* under the pretext of world victory. At this, Baiju's eyes welled up tears. He embraced Tansen and said that he was that unlucky Baiju.

Having found Baiju, Tansen was beyond himself with pleasure and prostrated at the feet of Baiju, who, only with great difficulty, could calm Tansen. Baiju requested the emperor to give Tansen the great master, the highest position among his musicians and artists, which the emperor readily agreed to.

However, after some time, getting the opportunity, Tansen prayed Akbar for leave and departed for Rewa, never to return to Agra again. Akbar sent Jalaludin Khurchi to invite Tansen, but even then Tansen did not return to Agra. Akbar then sent Abul Fazal with instructions that in case Tansen did not return, he must bring him back by force, Rewa's queen together with the Akbar pearl (which was as large as twice the size of an egg).

Seeing that a great calamity was going to fall on the Rewa ruler's family on his account, Tansen reluctantly started for Agra. But he was unhappy all the time. He could not forget the love of the rulers of Rewa, and this feeling became so strong in him that he took a vow never to sing again in Akbar's court. Akbar, however, waited for an opportunity. He gave Tansen a beautiful house in the palace to live and provided him with all amenities.

Akbar had many wives besides Jodabai, called royal begums. Among them was one called Daulatabad Begum on whom Akbar had conferred special favours. Her daughter, Mehrunisa, was extraordinarily beautiful, a woman of character, religious minded, wise

and a lover of music.

Akbar took her to Tansen's garden and asked her to sing a Raag in a slightly defective manner. At the behest of her father, she started Bageshwari. The Raag reached Tansen's ears, too, who listened to it attentively.

He detected the deviation and became restless. Tansen then approached Mehrunisa. Having got her introduction, he told her about the deviation. Mehrunisa said that she could not but bow down before India's great artist, but she requested him to correct her. Tansen, who had been defying the ruler for so long, had to accept his defeat at the hands of the fair Mehrunisa. Tansen sat on the ground and began Bageshwari gradually. He lost himself in the sweet melody and Mehrunisa, too, lost her heart to Tansen. Akbar was listening to him from behind some trees, gradually Akbar appeared before Tansen. He requested him to teach music to Mehrunisa, which he accepted. Akbar was much pleased when he came to learn about their love. He arranged a music festival in order to bring this to a successful conclusion.

The music festival was held in a famous palace of Agra. When Jihan Khan's turn came, he asked for a favour. He said that Tansen be asked to proceed first.

The Emperor smiled and looked at Tansen who stood up and said that there were no clouds in the sky at the time. He would like to invite clouds and to offer their fresh and sweet water to the emperor. He asked for a golden pot to be brought and placed there. A golden vessel on a sandalwood stand was placed before the gathered audience. Tansen began with prayers to Mother Saraswathi, his guru Swami Haridas and then looking at the eager sweet face of Mehrunisa, he started Megh Raag.

A small patch of clouds began to gather in the clear sky. Gradually, the clouds began to thicken and then came the rain and drop by drop the golden pot was filled. Tansen offered the golden pot full of water to the emperor.

Akbar married Mehrunisa with Tansen with royal decorum and Tansen embraced Islam. A Persian historian of Akbar's court says that Tansen died on April 26, 1586 A.D. His body was taken to Gawalior with full royal honours and buried near the mausoleum of his spiritual guru, Muhammad Ghous. ■