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# Sangeet Natak



*Conversations:*

*P.L. Deshpande/Rajinder Nath • Nataraj Ramakrishna/Ranganayaki Ayyangar  
Radhika Mohan Maitra/B.C. Deva • Begum Akhtar/K.C.D. Brahaspati  
Master Fida Hussain/Balbir Pathak • Anjanibai Malpekar/Naina Devi*

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Front cover: Anjanibai Malpekar; Delhi, 1958



Back cover: Begum Akhtar (centre) and her student Rita Kothari with Khayal-singer Tarapada Chakravarty; Delhi, 1973.

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**Rajinder Nath** (b. 1935) is a leading director of the Hindi stage who established the group Abhiyan in Delhi in 1967. He has produced the work of Indian playwrights exclusively, bringing new drama into the realm of Hindi theatre. Rajinder Nath was director of the Shri Ram Centre theatre repertory in the 1980s and, till recently, taught English at Rajdhani College in Delhi.

**Ranganayaki Ayyangar** (b. 1927) is a Carnatic musician and musicologist who worked as an archivist at Sangeet Natak Akademi in the early 1980s. Subsequently, she headed the music department at Benaras Hindu University and was Director of Sampradaya, a resource centre for Carnatic music in Chennai. She is at present working on Somanatha's *Raga Vibodha*, and divides her time between Mumbai and Delhi.

**B.C. Deva** (1922–81) was a reputed musicologist who worked as Assistant Secretary in charge of music at Sangeet Natak Akademi. He was among the founders of the Acoustical Society of India and the Indian Musicological Society, and published several books and monographs including *Psycho-acoustics of Music and Speech* and *Tonal Structure of Tambura*.

**Krishna Chandra Deva Brahaspati** (1918–79) was a leading music scholar and thinker. Well versed in the Sanskrit classics, he prepared an annotated edition of the Swaradhyaya chapter of the *Natyashastra* besides the multi-volume *Raga Rahasya* and *Sangeet Chintamani*. He was based in Delhi.

**Balbir Pathak** is a theatre enthusiast based in Moradabad. He was on the staff of the Moradabad station of All India Radio for many years.

**Naina Devi** (1920–93) was a prominent musical personage of Delhi, well-established as singer, teacher, and promoter of good music. She was closely connected with the Rampur gharana and wrote a brief biography of her teacher Mushtaq Hussain Khan, published by Sangeet Natak Akademi. Shubha Mudgal, Vidya Rao, and Madhumita Ray are among her students performing today.

Oral history was not a term current in India in the 1950s, when Sangeet Natak Akademi started its work in documentation of music, dance, and theatre. However, the interview was common enough, owing to the history of broadcasting in the country. Where literacy was low, the spoken word was bound to dominate, and was used to advantage across the spectrum of public concerns.

Thus as Sangeet Natak Akademi prepared for work, the interview would have readily suggested itself as a form and means of putting on record the life-story of artists of achievement. In a field where oral culture flourished, it was also a natural choice over other means of capturing the portrait of an artist. There were many opportunities for 'interviews', now not for broadcast: music recordings in the Akademi's studio, public performances in and out of town, special shoots commissioned for the archive, and occasions where artists were honoured with awards. Fellow artists, scholars in relevant disciplines, and sometimes members of the staff took the place of interviewer.

And thus the interview became a component of documentation at Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the files grew. There are a few hundred at present. Researchers have accessed them in the archives of the Akademi, and transcripts have sometimes been published singly in this journal. In this issue, six interviews are published all together, to draw attention to this great reserve of primary material.

The interviews published here are a random sample, and are not chosen with regard to any central theme. The dates range from 1963 to 1986, and do not mark the beginning or end of the activity. Interviews both in English and Hindi/Hindustani are included, as these are the principal languages in which recordings are available. (Non-Hindi readers, we realize, will consequently miss half the contents of the issue, and must make do for now with the introductions in English. Translations of the interviews in Hindi, or excerpts from them, will be carried in *Sangeet Natak* at a later date.)

The spoken word can scarcely be carried into print without editorial mediation. However, the editorial hand has been restrained here to preserve the quality of speech, *per se*, and the manner of each speaker. Linking words and phrases have been enclosed in square brackets. A few lexical errors have been corrected, and more often syntax reworked to facilitate reading and comprehension. For the same reasons, sizeable portions of text have been removed in about half the interviews published (Deshpande, Hussain, Malpekar). Readers will also observe exceptions to these general rules here.

Re-viewing the contents of the issue, one reaffirms the value of the spoken word in a biographical programme involving performing artists. The spoken word is of the moment, it is wayward and free, and is endowed with a power of suggestion most artists would not be able to put into script. Beyond any fact contained in these pages, readers will sense these signals in the air, and connect with the artists who are speaking here in spirit as in locus of history.

