



Truly Ashwini...

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Abstract:

Here what I write is like an offering to Ashwini, from the eyes of her guru-behen, and someone who has watched her closely for almost four decades. Having grown up on the staple diet of Hindustani music, added to that a special affinity to the Jaipur Gayaki, I would naturally decipher her musical leanings. But having the big fortune of being, the disciple of the great Guru, Smt. Manik tai Bhide, and by that relation, being Ashwini's "guru-behen", I would also like to write in this essay, about her fascinating personality apart from that of the singer in her.

However I find it necessary to spell out at the onset of this article, that I am not elucidating in detail about all those people and those happenings; who have and which have respectively made an influence on Ashwini, and have contributed to her making as a singer and as a person, apart from her mother and prime Guru and inspiration, Manik Tai. Neither am I illuminating in detail, about all the facets of Ashwini's huge contribution to the field of music.

...Manik Tai is the fountainhead for us, the force that has shown us the way beyond the physical colossus of music. Ashwini is like the river that flows out of this fountainhead and runs its course on difficult terrains, takes the risk of surging

into new landscapes and gathers fertile soil along the way to help new saplings sprout out; and in its entirety adds to this vast ocean of music

...In our philosophy and our art form, we take pride in holding close to our hearts the debt of gratitude we owe to our Guru; we do not work to repay it as such. But sometimes one is blessed with a path which leads to shouldering the unsaid obligation we owe to our revered ones. Such a blessed disciple can take an unfinished journey to its completion and in turn fulfill certain unattended duties.

...Till date, mindful restraint and balance is the hallmark of Ashwini's raag badhat and concert presentation. Her raag badhat is a rare balance of aesthetic improvisation coupled with an intelligent command over the grammar of the raag. In the vilambit alaapi (slow paced raag expansion), Ashwini, makes the listener fall in love with the notes of the raag.

...The trance may progress from alaapi to taankari or from slow pace to fast pace or from simplicity to complexity, but the effect at all times must be that of the feel of the raag, not a jarring indulgence of the persona of the singer. The artiste's skill, command, temperament, aesthetics, wizardry will by default, be reflected in the raag exposition as a result of his submission to the raag and its mood. So the audience also submits to that mood. This is how restraint and discretion come in to play and positively 'affect' the 'effect' of a music presentation.

... It is true that Ashwini sows the seeds of rich ideas of music in her recitals and we as listeners and connoisseurs of this great art form, reap the fruits.

Her core leans towards 'natural' beauty in its pristine form, and that, is the true spirit of our music which transcends beyond time and space, to reach out to the divine.

....there are no full stops here....the journey continues....

Radiance of Tradition
 Innovation of
 Convention Inspired
 Artistry
 Natural
 Genius
 Brilliant Guru
 Beautiful
 Mind

To write about Ashwini Bhide Deshpande; the artiste par excellence, the name to reckon with in Indian Classical Music, the performer who has won innumerable hearts, all over the world, with her dulcet voice and powerful singing, and also the Guru who has many promising worthy disciples; is a challenging exercise. Having grown up on the staple diet of Hindustani music, added to that a special affinity to the Jaipur Gayaki, I would naturally decipher her musical leanings. But having the big fortune of being, the disciple of the great Guru, Smt. Manik tai Bhide, and by that relation, being Ashwini's "guru-behen", I would also like to write in this essay, about her fascinating personality apart from that of the singer in her. However I find it necessary to spell out at the onset of this article, that I am not elucidating in detail about all those people and those happenings; who have and which have respectively made an influence on Ashwini, and have contributed to her making as a singer and as a person, apart from her mother and prime Guru and inspiration, Manik Tai. Neither am I illuminating in detail, about all the facets of Ashwini's huge contribution to the field of music. I may do that kind of an all encompassing piece of work on Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, as the next step; but not without doing an in-depth study by virtue of interviewing certain people, interacting in that context with Ashwini herself and also re-visiting her assignments and her recordings, researching more about the evolution of her stylized gayaki and many other such inputs . Here what I write is like an offering to Ashwini, from the eyes of her guru-behen, and someone who has watched her closely for almost four decades.

Let me take you back to the days when Ashwini was pursuing her doctorate in Biochemistry at the famed research institute of BARC (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre) at Trombay, located far away from the heart of Mumbai city. She had

been meritorious throughout her education; rank holder at the State Board exam of the 10th and the 12th year, first ranker for the Bachelor's and Master's degree in Microbiology at the Bombay University and then the premium PhD program she worked for at the BARC! In many of her interviews, you will come across how casually she mentions the "Taalim" (training) part of her growing up years. Her taalim in music, was indeed a part and parcel of her daily routine, but in no measure a casual affair. The extremely high standards set by her family, with special mention here of her mother, her Guru, Manik Tai were enough to sweat out a professional singer. And Ashwini was supposed to be an 'amateur', pursuing music as a serious passion alongside her academics. There was no decision about music becoming her full-fledged occupation. One may barely say that this thought was just under speculation. Those BARC days, she would hardly get 2 to 3 hours of riyaz (practice) time in a day. But the fine craftsmanship of her output to Manik tai's invaluable input as a Guru was equivalent to many tedious hours of a meticulous long drawn out riyaz done by a shishya in the towering presence of her/his Guru.

In the Guru-Shishya parampara that our musical heritage justifiably boasts of the disciple spends uncountable number of hours under his Guru's watchful tutelage. Much of that time spent with the Guru, would result in lubricating the medium of music; (the voice or the sound production of an instrument) apart from imbibing the "vidya" (knowledge), of the building of a repertoire and importantly of raag "badhat" (development). Long hours of riyaz would certainly polish the technical prerequisites of voice production and fortify the health and stamina of the voice.

Ashwini is blessed with a mellifluous voice, healthy with a notable range of higher octave. But those days she needed to work on her voice throw in the lower octaves and did not match up to the resonance of Manik tai's commanding voice. Manik tai cajoled the notes of an alaap with superb elasticity and with an un-fathomable majestic gait to her voice ("loech"). Ashwini's fertile imagination, revamped the same alaap to a subtly modified "sur-sangati" (a pattern of intertwined notes). Ashwini was still honing the 'bearing' of her voice, but she intelligently used her creativity to bring out the best of her vocal merits.

Ashwini's firm conviction towards making use of her voice in her own individualistic way, rather than to run after making it sound like her Guru's voice, is a lesson many aspiring students should learn from. Yet the noteworthy part is that she did not for even once, make the merits of her voice her comfort zone.

She always made an honest attempt to scrape off the shortcomings even when they were very well over-shadowed by her assets. And till date she strives to shake off anything that brings dissatisfaction to her, she refuses to rest in her comfort zone. Every artiste needs that comfort zone but must make clever use of it to make his way further into the journey of music making. In my opinion, one must use this comfort only as a launching pad to visit more challenging terrains. This is what truly makes an artiste evolve timely, at every stage of his artistry. With utter honesty, Ashwini forges ahead because of her unstinting belief in uncovering the 'undone'! Her bandish compositions, her theme based presentations, the "achop" (unusual and rare) raags she delves into, and also on the flip side, her presentation of tried and tested foundational raags in the garb of new compositions, are some of the testimonies to this ever evolving nature of Ashwini.

Going back to the past scene of the Guru-Shishya Taalim, Manik tai would belt out one taan after another, with tremendous strength and vigor in her voice. Yet again, though Ashwini was still in the process of building that vigor in her voice, she wedged into those taans like a perfect fitting of a lock and key. Ashwini used the swiftness and alacrity of her voice to its fullest to transform the vigor into lightening. Better still, at times it was like watching a friendly match between two players. Manik tai would throw a taan at Ashwini, then Ashwini would catch it, skillfully modify it in its angle or gait and then toss it back at Manik tai. Sometimes, Ashwini's taan would fall out of place. Manik tai, would simply pick up that crumbling taan, realign it and participate in this friendly match like a marker does, in the absence of a coach. Unlike the usual scene, where a teacher would overtly correct her student and make her follow the original taan, Manik tai would help Ashwini understand her own creation of the altered pattern. I realized that Manik tai could do so, not only because she is a Guru in the true sense that the word stands for; but also because of Ashwini's brilliant grip over the raag discipline. Her brilliant mind would combine unusual patterns of notes to make a complimentary string of taans. It was a precious experience to be an audience and even a spectator

to the way in which Ashwini processed an alaap or a taan, which Manik tai sang out in her abundantly power packed voice. During taalim, Manik tai's insistence was that we either repeat after her or, we aesthetically modify her piece without disturbing the crux of her pattern. Manik tai's prime focus was to bring out and maintain the "feel" of the raag.

Needless to say, Ashwini was an ace at this!

Ashwini was already flying high on the concert scene as a brilliant upcoming young artiste. By the age of about 24, she had performed at the most prestigious music conferences which spanned across the country. She had received blessings in the form of praise from many stalwarts. During the mid eighties, typically the atmosphere that we were brought up in by our Guru was that of restraint and balance.

Till date, mindful restraint and balance is the hallmark of Ashwini's raag badhat and concert presentation. Her raag badhat is a rare balance of aesthetic improvisation coupled with an intelligent command over the grammar of the raag. In the vilambit alaapi (slow paced raag expansion), Ashwini makes the listener fall in love with the notes of the raag. She is in no hurry to expose her command over the raag. She is in no hurry to display her vocal capabilities. She is in no hurry to juggle the notes and send her audience into a tizzy of excitement. She is in no hurry! The effect of alaapi should be soothing. It should lead you into a trance. It should let you feel the raag itself and not the person vocalizing the raag. This is where restraint plays an important role, provided the artiste truly comprehends the meaning of restraint and believes in it. This is what Manik tai has imparted to all her disciples. Ashwini makes it happen.

Even as Ashwini progresses to a drut laya (fast paced rhythm) she unleashes unexpected flashes of superb taankari. Her speed may go beyond the expected. The combination of those speedy notes can be unusual but Ashwini never hurls them at the listener. The speed, the flashes and the complexity of the taans, become truly musical if they continue to transport the listener to a trance without jolting him.

The trance may progress from alaapi to taankari or from slow pace to fast pace or from simplicity to complexity, but the effect at all times must be that of the feel of the raag, not a jarring indulgence of the persona of the singer. The artiste's skill, command, temperament, aesthetics, wizardry will by default, be reflected in the raag exposition as a result of his submission to the raag and its mood. So the audience also submits to that mood. This is how restraint and discretion come into play and positively 'affect' the 'effect' of a music presentation. Ashwini is one such artiste who entrances her listeners as she intensely puts up her vision of the raag, without letting the spontaneity wane.

Restrain is a loaded word, it is not a perception, rather it is an actualization. And hence restrain truly is the characteristic feature of Ashwini's personality, not only her music. Her conduct in life, has never crossed the limits of a healthy argument or a proportionate expression of displeasure. I never cease to wonder how a person who has so much to balance in life; with her music, her family, her disciples, her friends, her varied interests has never clashed severely with anybody ever. Considering the large and busy scale of activities that entail a top artiste of national and international repute, she seems to have managed it all without colliding unfavorably with anyone. She has gracefully walked out of sticky situations and unwanted controversies. I will come back to elaborate on this point a bit later.

The attribute, namely 'patience', in the making of music while exploring the raag translated to our way of thinking outside of the realm of riyaz, as well. We never thought of packaging our music to market it wisely. Making 'demo-cassettes' for the perusal of organizers came to our mind much later in life. Self promotion was unheard of in our upbringing. Ashwini, of course, never needed to do this. She was a winner of the President's Gold Medal for Classical Music, of the All India Radio at a very young age. Accolades or grading for an artiste from A. I. R. was like an institutional qualification, even more impressive than the 'Sangeet Visharad' or a Bachelor's degree earned through well known Universities of Music. Ashwini got invited to many music platforms and her name spread by word of mouth. She sincerely believed that her music would speak for itself. She was fiercely committed to a conscious riyaz, at every moment of her formative years, under her mother's tutelage. By 'conscious' riyaz I mean that which is not necessarily

physical vocalization, but a mental connection to the sur, an involvement of one's own 'being' with music. Once she had pointed out that many times, during her laboratory experiments in Microbiology she would relate the microscopic view of microorganisms on the slide to the "sukshmata" (infinitesimal nature) of a shruti (microtone). She was strict in her approach to preparing for a concert. "No excuses!" she would say. Having accepted a concert, once on the performing stage, the demands of her academic pursuits running parallel could not and did not matter. Ashwini has always been a stickler for perfection. Like I mentioned earlier, her family and she herself had set very high standards of musicianship. Hence, Ashwini did not make much of praise that came her way via reviews in leading daily publications by esteemed music critics nor did she get swayed by the admiration she received from seniors. These compliments and appreciation from greats are considered as their blessings and their nod of approval. She had quipped once on her return from BARC, on the day a dazzling review of Ashwini's Concert, by the esteemed critic, Shri Mohan Nadkarni, had been featured in the Times Of India, that, "there was so much talk about the review in office today, people kept paying me compliments.....so much so that I too almost began to believe that I must've sung well!" So there again, 'balance' at work, an extremely level headed personality - 'young artiste - Ashwini Bhide'!

During my learning sessions, with Manik tai, sometimes I used to meet Ashwini upon her return from BARC in the evening. I used to look forward to such meetings. She was an energy pill. She would quickly go inside, refresh herself and join us. Manik tai would sometimes continue with the same raag or change the piece. Without wasting a moment, Ashwini would start her alaaps or taans. There was a certain affable defiance in Ashwini's fare, she would never repeat after Manik tai, after all it was not her tuition time, it was my tuition time! So Ashwini would join in lovingly, but execute the matter in her own way, to broaden my view of the said raag. Many of such instances, she would have a somewhat different take. To have this "mother-daughter" duo who was essentially also a "Guru-Shishya" duo carry out the task of training a student was in itself an eye-opener. I have marveled at her energy, to take such a keen interest in our on-going session, though she could have skipped it all to relax herself after a long day's work.

To the fortune of many of Manik Tai's younger students, Ashwini has forever been standing strong like an ever-flowing fountain of knowledge. Be it to widen the raag perspective, or to increase the "bhandaar" (repertoire) of bandishes, or be it to pass on thumris, bhajans and other forms of singing, Ashwini has always made herself available and accessible. Basically that is what makes her a Guru in her own right. Manik Tai is the fountainhead for us, the force that has shown us the way beyond the physical colossus of music. Ashwini is like the river that flows out of this fountainhead and runs its course on difficult terrains, takes the risk of surging into new landscapes and gathers fertile soil along the way to help new saplings sprout out and in its entirety adds to this vast ocean of music.

Great masters have a thirst for learning. The more the riches they carry, of the legacy heirloom bandishes, the more their longing to possess new gems. Only difference is that a true master does not merit the word possession with the meaning, "hoarding" something. On the contrary, they keep possession of it till they polish it further, create some more facets to it and then share it with the world. Ashwini takes in the most appropriate matter from the world around her. Then she passes it through a process of synthesis and makes it her own. To be an observer to this process of 'synthesis' is beautiful, and need I add that it is worth emulating. If you are a keen observer, you will realize that, when one is going through the process of synthesis, one is not even aware of it. It is a function of one's broad attitude and an introspective search from within for the elusive. Ashwini's honest regard for others' opinions, a healthy sense of pride in what she has imbibed, and the verve to earnestly display the turn out of this synthesis to the world, make her a unique performer. Ashwini cannot rest with something she has learnt; until it becomes her own, she brands it with her style, touch and power.

Building a new version of the old, giving expression to an illusion, or a fresh interpretation of tradition, Ashwini does it with élan. She will conceive a beautiful scheme with a long lasting validity that carries over to the next generation. Let me elucidate on a 10-CDs project of Sanskrit shlokas, titled "Navagrahas", which Ashwini composed and sang. To seek out beautiful musical phrases from appropriate raags, and convert them into a distinctive tune, which then lends its appeal and expression to the Sanskrit shlokas; is not an ordinary task of merely fulfilling the job of a music director. It requires an in depth understanding of Sanskrit as a

language, an understanding of the significance of each shloka, and an exhaustive but artistic viewpoint of the grammar of the raag and of course an inspired mind. I have been witness to this exercise and it was a humbling experience. Although Ashwini had recorded many short songs in the form of bhajans, abhangs, folk and light classical fare, alongside her pure classical recordings, this exercise of singing a large number of shlokas, day after day, for over a month was a one of its kind assignment. Ashwini caught on with the technique of singing pre-set, lyric-heavy content, and delivering it behind the mike, in a recording studio with considerable ease. It is indeed a daunting task for a "filbadi" (extempore) artiste to do pre-set matter of that much magnitude (10 CDs); without losing its emotive aspect and while maintaining perfect diction (no way out on that front as it was in pristine 'Sanskrit'). And since this was to be a commercial product of a recording on CDs done for posterity, the voice had to be in pretty much trim/exactly right condition, without compromising on its natural timbre and appeal. Everything had to be spot on and yet spontaneous in feel.

When you take an overview of Ashwini's varied gamut of works, you realize that it will not be an exaggeration to say that Ashwini can convert a piece of data into an endearing item for those who relish any form of creativity. One gets to see how a profound study of the psyche and the poetry of saint poets like Kabir, Soordas and Meera, translates into classic musical expressions, with happy intrusions of folk music which is well suited to the idiom of these bhajans. And that's not all, she writes a seamless commentary designed to carry the audience along with her, as she moves from one bhajan to the next.

It is her sincere endeavor to familiarize her listener, with the quaint language of that era and the micro meaning of the lyrics therein. It will be interesting to note that for her home productions, Ashwini went out of her way to make sure that even the CD jackets were made to look beautiful, with a stamp of her choice. The art work, sleeve notes, the design concept, the colour scheme and all such elements were painstakingly created or delegated to the concerned commercial artiste. Yet in all this she would give the least importance to the appearance of her own name and photograph. She is so low profile about self-projection that, in that respect she has been compared to a legendary singer of India, by a family

member of that singer. Her zeal in giving anything her hundred percent untiringly amazes me.

To remain rooted in the gharana that one belongs to, to master most of the heirlooms (gharana bandishes), to have a recall power with an elephant's memory for innumerable other traditional compositions from different sources and yet smoothly let out the creative drive in oneself to humbly present 'Raagarachananjali' a book and CD ; of your self-composed bandishes is no mean feat. Of course the book was consequential to the flourishing presentation of these bandishes at many concerts. It makes me wonder if Ashwini has an in-built, automated encyclopedia, with a "create new" option! It will be tiring to list out many more such illustrations. However, I must mention here an emotional and proud moment for Ashwini when the legendary, Bharat Ratna, Pandit Ravi Shankar ji, willingly wrote the foreword for "Raagarachananjali" which aptly encapsulated Ashwini's music. Pandit ji took a keen interest in this book. Such moments outweigh any number of awards. There are not only such projects like 'Raagarachananjali', 'Soordas', 'Navagrahas', which have a lofty size, but also those of a day-to-day nature like that of, conceiving innumerable workshop for students, thematic concerts and so on. And then, there is a humane touch to all of these incredible activities. She wants to take the world with her and move on. She wants to share and take that extra length of step for those who lag behind. This must be the reason that today, many of her worthy students follow this path of exploring new horizons. They too conceptualize different themes and make interesting presentations. Ashwini has every reason to be proud of her zealous disciples. But in the same stride Ashwini also keeps an open mind towards the evaluation of their activities. And hence she puts their activities to test. She strengthens their abilities by exposing them to a friendly but strictly discerning audience. Truly Ashwini is a unique blend of a willing teacher, a taskmaster, a guide; and of course a non-compromising Guru! She conducts herself with exceptional poise!

The word poise, brings me to another topic now. I had made a passing reference about coming back to this point, when I was elaborating on Ashwini's nature. I had mentioned that 'restrain' is the characteristic feature of Ashwini's personality. In the process of building one's career one cannot escape the reality of certain unpleasant happenings that come one's way. One is already struggling to make

a foothold; in that, it can get disheartening to shrug off a cloud of dismay that comes to surround upcoming artistes in the form of undue criticism. Every generation of young artistes has its share of difficulties, and Ashwini's generation was relatively docile and understated. Ashwini herself being an innately low key person, prefers to remain inconspicuous rather than blatantly defend herself, even if she has many reasons to do so. Though she has an extremely modest demeanor, she is forthright about her views and is always bold in upholding her viewpoint on something and has never had stage-fright. It is amazing how one person can contain this balance; to be both, low key as well as forthright.

The turn of some events, in the early days of Ashwini's rising career were unfortunately such, that she had to face certain misplaced accusations. Fingers were wrongly being pointed at Ashwini and Manik Tai; it was unjustifiable to say the least. As students of Manik Tai we belong to, that school of music, which Manik Tai hails from. Thus the doyenne of that school becomes our beloved icon and we elevate the icon to the status of divinity. In our culture of Hindustani Music, 'reverence' to "Gurujans" is the last word; there is no scope for reasoning out the wrong and the right. However, it does pierce when you are faced with reproach from someone you worship and keep so close to your heart. But Ashwini never let any disparaging remark de-motivate her. Ashwini must have definitely suffered this in silence, with a sense of submission; but she did not let it affect her music. She did not harbor a bitterness then, nor in the future to come. Over the years, Ashwini arrived at a stage where she was considered as an outstanding artiste of the newer generation of younger veterans, worthy of wearing the mantle of old maestros. After a few more years Ashwini became an even more acclaimed artiste, with a visible following of ardent admirers of her own. Grace and dignity are personified by Ashwini. When one's "sadhana" (entreaty to search for the unknown) in music becomes a means of prayer to seek the sublime; one gets the willpower to persist steadily in an action or belief, despite problems. Ashwini gathered the courage to face sticky circumstances, head on. And her motto of "my work will speak for itself" came to life more than ever before. She converted the negativity of her past experiences into a positivity. She not only stroled her way out to get rid of the old unwanted baggage, but acquired accolades in its place. She perseveringly brought about the most sublime reunion of two hearts

which were intensely connected. What a priceless moment it was for both, the Guru and the shishyaa!

Ashwini does not delve on the unpleasant, be it the past or be it forthcoming. She wants to break free from every iceberg and open up space for a free flowing river, watering all that is along the way and pave a fertile soil bed to enable the new generations to tread on it without any inhibitions.

Ashwini is spontaneous in her reactions though it is also true that her opinion on a topic is a result of a diligent study of that topic. That is what makes her stand apart from the run of the mill. Well, not only for a new project will she put in study time, she puts in sincere efforts to prepare for an impending concert. Particularly if it is theme based, Ashwini goes into "study mode". She will research the whereabouts of that theme. Typically she has been approached for that theme because she is qualified to make a presentation on that theme, she is experienced to elaborate on that topic to enrich her listeners. Yet it is not to Ashwini's satisfaction, that she will rely only on the already researched data. She will look out for recently published material or surf the internet for fresh additions to that topic. She will question herself on the points which she has explored earlier and ruminate on them. She will evaluate her opinions once again. Whether she is going to present Ustad Alladiya Khan's compositions or whether it is a festival of "Winter Raags", even if it is a broader generic topic like "Jaipur Gharana Gayaki" or "Raag Badhat"; Ashwini will dedicatedly chalk out a plan. She will assign time durations to each of the sub-topics therein and will chisel out a well crafted production. She will succinctly define the step wise construction of the matter she has chosen to present. Her overall presentation always becomes musically appealing notwithstanding the scholastic units contained in it. It is a golden melting pot of old and new ideas, defined opinions, well thought out structure, and above all aesthetics being the focal point of it all.

Ashwini has an unending source of energy to pursue the ray of light that leads to knowledge. It is incredible that she has a thirst, to not only keep learning more on her subject, but also gather from where she has not been before. The translation of a book written in English, (Noble Laureate Physicist & Chemist, Marie Curie's Biography) authored by her daughter Eva Curie; to Marathi language, is not

only a result of Ashwini's leaning towards science and academics but also her deep curiosity to explore anything that is inspiring. She uses lucid language, with command, and makes this translated book a worthy piece of work, in its own right.

For such an intense artiste like Ashwini, it might be surprising to know that she is not a "one track" kind of person. She has a keen interest in heritage beauty; like textiles, jewelry, architecture. She has a discerning eye for beauty. On a fine day when she has some time at her disposal, she will enthusiastically visit a textile exhibition, and carefully pick some exquisite piece of fabric or saree. I have been the lucky recipient of her tasteful choice. I have also been lucky to enjoy her lively company at such handloom expos. Once she visited an archeological site in Bhuj, and described the details so vividly to me a few days later. It was as if she was a student of history and was on an excavation mission! Another time, she came back from a mountain trek with a roaring experience of this physically demanding activity. Ashwini is ever so willing to experience anything new, but only when she is convinced of the genuineness of the source. Though Ashwini has a frugal appetite, she heartily enjoys a good meal, she may also decipher the recipe to try it out herself some day. Well! Basically whatever she takes interest in, and whichever activity she undertakes, she makes the most of it, and takes the best benefit out of it. Of course it is evident from her varied projects and interests that she is a voracious reader, with a ravenous hunger to feed her cerebral appetite. But in all these activities; music or otherwise, she never seems to get worn out. She is full of life and laughter. Even her conversations are laced with a child like curiosity and glee. But not one to waste precious time; Ashwini will politely wriggle out of something, if the company of the people and the topic in discussion are not to her interest. Simply put, she is a prolific person full of zest to make each moment of her life productive.

To sum up about Ashwini's quantum of work and her journey so far; is actually not advisable! You know why, simply because many times when you feel that you are aware of her latest activities and achievements, she surprises you with something entirely new that she has taken on hand! Maybe I have not done enough justice in writing this essay - while I stand in admiration of her, to gather it all in my cupped palms, she is advancing with the speed of engulfing waves arising from the ocean.

Yet I shall dare to pen down about something that I yearn to get more and more from Ashwini. I dare to yearn for it, mainly because Ashwini has spoiled me, with her superlative artistry and raag visualization. It is true that Ashwini sows the seeds of rich ideas of music in her recitals and we as listeners and connoisseurs of this great art form, reap the fruits...Ashwini's cerebral dispensation finds scope for 'cultivated' beauty in the form of her vast repertoire of bandishes, grammar oriented rare raag exposition, new raag-discoveries, thematic raagdari and so on. Having said that, I would want more and more of that music, which is essentially what she represents - "saatvick" (chaste). Her core leans towards 'natural' beauty in its pristine form, and that, is the true spirit of our music which transcends beyond time and space, to reach out to the divine. So while remembering one amongst those special moments, when Ashwini transported her listeners to experience that bliss in her Marubihag, I shall put a full stop....or maybe not, there are no full stops here....the journey continues....



