

Classical Music Tradition of Deshpande Family

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In classical Indian music, there are many families who are either singing or playing instrument music for generations together. In musical language such families are called 'Gharanas'. To be a member of Gharana, one need not be a relative or ancestral member of the family in a traditional meaning but disciples are also counted as members of such Gharanas.

These Gharanas were and are being criticized by critics for their styles and changes they made in their traditions. The word Gharana is predominantly used for those who perform music. But in this article, we are going to consider a family busy in music in variety of ways like singing as a profession, as a hobby, writing on music as critic, writing biographies of musicians, writing history of musical event, performing scientific experiments with the help of music, helping to give status to musicians in the society, organizing music programmes and so on. Music is a common thread in this Gharana for past 125 years. This is the Deshpande Gharana staying in the state of Maharashtra, India.

Tradition begins from Mr. Hari Sakharam Deshpande (1869-1949) and his brother Mr. Shivaram Sakharam Deshpande. If we take this generation as a beginning then their fourth generation can be traced out in Miss Apoorva, Mrs. Shruti, Mr. Rahul and Master Srujan. These are all budding musicians.

Mr. Hari Sakharam Deshpande had four sons viz. Ayurvedacharya (practitioner in Ayurvedic medicines) Pandurang Hari (P.H.) Deshpande, Chartered Accountant Vaman Hari (V.H.) Deshpande, Mr. Shridhar Hari Deshpande and Professor Sakharam Hari Deshpande. He also had five daughters viz. Sundarabai, Chandrabai, Indumati, Leelavati and Shashikala. Mr. Shivaram Sakharam Deshpande had two sons and five daughters viz. Dr. Vasant Shivaram (V.S.) Deshpande, Engineer Damodar Shivaram Deshpande as sons and Kamal, Vimal, Kalavati, Leelavati and Kusum as daughters.

Father of Hari Sakharam Deshpande and Shivaram Sakharam Deshpande viz. Sakharam Shivaram Deshpande had a musical voice and he used to sing Bhajans (devotional songs). Hari Sakharam's wife Mrs. Satyabhamabai had also a musical voice. Hari Sakharam Deshpande (1869-1949), a trained pleader, settled in the village of Shirwal in the princely state Bhor of Satara district in the state of Maharashtra. One musician by name Ravajibuva stayed at Shirwal for one year around 1897. Hari Sakharam took some lessons in music from him. Then Hari Sakharam went to Gwalior, Mecca of musicians. He learned music from Baba Dixit, a disciple of Hassukhan. He mainly learned Dhrupad and Dhamar style in Gwalior style of music. Around that time, there was a person named Vasudev Shirwalkar who wrote stories for drama. He owned a drama group and staged few dramas such as 'Rana Bhimdeo', 'Panipatcha Mukabala' (Battle of Panipat) and 'Panna'. Hari Sakharam acted in these dramas. He wanted to join Kirloskar group of drama, a very famous group of that time. In a professional group like

that, one had to play many roles, many characters, including those of females. Women were not acting in dramas during those days, so men-folk used to play women characters hence one had to clean shave his moustaches. But according to social taboo, one could not remove his moustaches so long as his father was alive and thus Hari Sakharam refrained himself from joining this group.

Hari Sakharam taught Dhrupad and Dhamar to his two sons, viz., P. H. Deshpande and V. H. Deshpande and daughter Sundarabai. Sundarabai had a musical voice and a potential to be a singer but the social traditions did not permit women from a cultured family to learn music for a stage performance. Forget about women but even for men-folk, acting in drama or giving stage performances of music was not taken in the right spirit by the society. It was difficult to marry a girl from such a house.

Music tradition started really taking shape from the next generation of Hari Sakharam and his brother Shivaram Sakharam Deshpande. Eldest son of Hari Sakharam Deshpande viz. P. H. Deshpande (1902-1956) learned music under the guidance of Yadavrao Joshi (Gwalior style), Sureshababu Mane (Kirana style) and Basavraj Rajguru (Kirana style). P. H. Deshpande was not a stage artist but he was the musicologist par excellence. He used to practice Ayurvedic medicine style and had a research bent of mind. He carried out an experiment to find out the effect of classical music on the growth of 'touch me not' (Mimiso pudico) plant and showed that soothing music helps this plant to grow. He wanted to extrapolate this thesis in curing long ailing patients with a music therapy. He wrote number of articles combining music and Ayurveda. Musicians used to get a third grade treatment from the society until 1950's. But he observed that these people are pursuing their profession seriously like any other profession and they need a helping hand in raising their social status. To fulfill this, P. H. Deshpande celebrated 60th birth anniversary of Harmonium player Govindrao Tembe in 1940 and of a musician Sawai Gandharva in 1946 by organizing public functions, inviting dignitaries and publishing commemorative volumes on these celebrities. He used to organize music programmes at his house regularly twice a year and popularise music.

Second son V. H. Deshpande (1907-1990) was a musician but did not perform professionally. He performed on All India Radio for 40 years. He was a Chartered Accountant by profession and pursued music as hobby. He was musicologist, critic, writer, orator and earned name and fame on a national level. Mr. V. H. Deshpande learned music under the guidance of Yadavrao Joshi, (Gwalior style), Sureshababu Mane, (Kirana style), Naththankhan (Jaipur style) and Moghubai Kurdikar (Jaipur style). He learned three styles but ultimately settled on Jaipur style.

Third son Shridhar Hari Deshpande (1914-1999) served in an Insurance company but was a music lover, a critic of high quality, used to teach music to students. By being in the company of Harmonium player Govindrao Tembe and musician Sureshababu Mane, he developed his music insight.

Fourth son Professor Sakharam Hari Deshpande (b.1924) has not learned music with anyone but can appreciate it and has a potential to criticize.

The only daughter of Hari Sakharam Deshpande who carried the torch of music was Shashikala (b.1928). She was married to Mr. K. R. Joshi. In Joshi family, there was no love for music but there was no hatred either. She was encouraged by her father-in-law and husband to pursue music. She took a formal training from Mr. Bhanudas Charankar, Kanchanmala Badhe and Vamanrao Sadolikar (Jaipur style) pursued her college education simultaneously and passed Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) with music and taught music in a school. She performed on All India Radio for 25 years and trained many students in music. She has been celebrating the death anniversary of her father-in-law by organizing a public music programme for past 27 years. For last couple of years, she is visiting a tribal area in Thane district to teach music to children. For last 5 years, she felicitates a non-popular senior musician with a monetary reward.

Hari Sakharam Deshpande's brother - Mr. Shivaram Sakharam Deshpande was a prison officer and ultimately rose to the position of Inspector General of Prisons during British regime in India. He used to sing Bhajans (Devotional songs). Elder son Dr. V. S. Deshpande (1916-1981) was a medical practitioner. In his early days, he learned music under the guidance of Dasharathbuva Mulay (Kirana style), Sureshbabu Mane (Kirana style), Basavraj Rajguru (Kirana style) and Sawai Gandharva (Kirana style). He married the daughter of Sawai Gandharva. Dr. V. S. Deshpande performed on All India Radio for 30 years. Sawai Gandharva died in the year 1952. In his memory, a music festival is being organized since 1953 by Dr. V. S. Deshpande and Sawai Gandharva's disciple Pundit Bhimsen Joshi, a musician of world fame. This festival runs for 3 days, musicians of national and international repute from vocal, instrumental and classical dance perform their art. Twenty five to 30 artists present their art before an audience of 10,000 to 15,000. This event provides an opportunity to amateurs and famous artists alike as a spring board. Dr. V. S. Deshpande (Secretary), Mr. V. H. Deshpande (Vice President), Dr. Prabhakar Deshpande, son of Dr. V. S. Deshpande (Trustee), Mr. Shreekant Deshpande, son of Dr. V. S. Deshpande (Trustee) and Mr. Milind Deshpande, son of P. H. Deshpande (Trustee since 1967) have served on the organizing committee of this festival. This festival is a big cultural event of our society.

Third generation of Deshpande Gharana is in music with vigor. Satyasheel Deshpande, son of V. H. Deshpande got the training under the guidance of his father for music and musicology. He took a formal training in music under Mr. Sham Gogate, at Deodhar School of Music and then under Pundit Kumar Gandharva, a legendary in Indian classical music. Satyasheel stayed at Kumar Gandharva's house for 5 years to learn music. After passing B. Com. Satyasheel's father V. H. Deshpande, wanted Satyasheel to be a Chartered Accountant like him but Satyasheel instead took music and musical activities as his profession. He founded Samvaad Foundation and under its auspices he has collected recordings of past and present artists in classical music of 8,000 hours. This archive is open to all those who want to study classical music. With the help of Ford Foundation grant, he has digitized it as well. Satyasheel sings on a professional stage, delivers lectures on music from a critic's point of view, writes articles and has given play back music to cinema like Lekin, Vijeta, and He geet jeevanache etc. Recently his music album 'Kahen' was released by Lata Mangeshkar.

Prof. Sakharam Hari Deshpande's daughter-in-law, Meenal Deshpande is a singer. She was formally training under Mr. Viththalrao Ghate (Gwalior style), Kishori Amonkar (Jaipur style) and now with Mr. Ratnakar Pai (Jaipur style). She bagged a fellowship from Human Research Development's Cultural Department, Government of India. She performs on All India Radio and Television.

Dr. V. S. Deshpande's first son is Dr. Prabhakar Deshpande. His wife Mrs. Padma Deshpande has taken formal training under the guidance of Vijay Karandikar and Saraswati Rane (Kirana style). She performs on professional stage and All India Radio.

Dr. V. S. Deshpande's second son - Shreekant Deshpande is a full time musician and has taken training in music under the guidance of Sawai Gandharva (Kirana style), Saraswati Rane (Kirana style), Pundit Bhimsen Joshi (Kirana style), Pundit Feroz Dastur (Kirana style) and Ustad Niyaz Ahmedkhan (Kirana style). He also organizes musical concerts and serves as an advisor to Lalit Kala Academy, University of Pune. Both Shreekant and Satyasheel Deshpande have widely traveled performing musical concerts. Satyasheel, Shreekant, Meenal and Padma Deshpande are the representatives of the third generation performing music on stage.

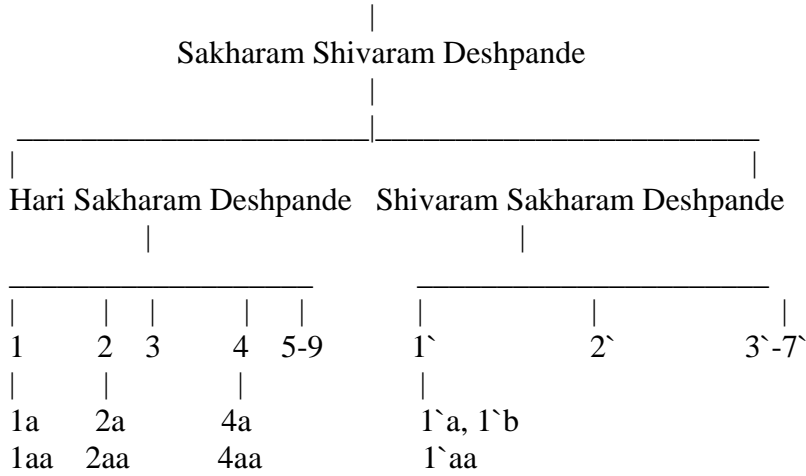
Many of second and third generation representatives have contributed to music in many other ways. P. H. Deshpande, besides editing two commemorative volumes as mentioned earlier, wrote many articles on music and musicians. He debated on music through the columns of news papers. V. H. Deshpande wrote four books on music and edited three more books on musicians. His first book 'Gharandaj Gayaki' discussed different styles in music. It has been serving as a basis for seminars and discussions in music. He was on the editorial board of a monthly devoted to music, 'Sangeet Kala Vihar' for 40 years. He participated in many music conferences and presented papers. He was instrumental in starting a music faculty in Mumbai University. He organized many music programmes in his young days and tutored few students in music. He was advisor to many music organizations. He studied few pillars in the temples of South India, known as musical pillars. If one sings before these pillars, they respond. Music was the passion of V. H. Deshpande. Shridhar Hari Deshpande authored few articles and translated Aaron Koplant's book on music and Anthony Stores' book on 'Music and Mind' into Marathi language. He was advisor to many music organizations. Prof. Sakharam Hari Deshpande has written few articles on musicians. Mr. Anant. P. Deshpande, son of P. H. Deshpande, who is representative of third generation, though not a performing musician has edited three books on music and related subjects. One book is on the memoirs of his uncle, V. H. Deshpande in which there is a historical account of music, musicians and musical activities during 1920 to 1985. Second book is a birth centenary volume of his father P. H. Deshpande. In this book many articles of P. H. Deshpande on music have been reproduced. Third book is on 'Fifty years of Sawai Gandharva Music festival'. This book gives list and photographs of the festival over previous 50 years, describes contemporary music festivals in India and provides information of artists of Kirana style of previous 100 years. Satyasheel Deshpande also writes articles on music.

Rahul, Srujan, Apoorva and Shruti are the representatives of the fourth generation. Rahul, grandson of P. H. Deshpande, son of Dr. Arvind P. Deshpande, has taken a training of Harmonium playing from Appa Jalagaonkar and has accompanied few artists in the U.S.A. Srujan, son of Satyasheel Deshpande, plays Guitar. Apoorva takes classical dance training under the guidance of Zelam Paranjape in Odissi style. She is also taking training in vocal music under the guidance of her mother Meenal Deshpande, under the fellowship from Central Government. Mrs. Shruti Deshpande, wife of Dr. Shailesh Deshpande, great grand daughter-in-law of Sawai Gandharva takes formal training from Leela Gharpure and pursues her M.A. in music. All these four representatives of the fourth generation are budding artists and preparing themselves to publicly perform on the stage.

It is noteworthy that the first two generations of Deshpande Gharana occupied themselves for their livelihood on different professions whereas the third generation viz. Satyasheel, Shreekant, Meenal and Padma are devoting their full time to music.

It seems that in all the four generations, nobody was compelled to take music as either hobby or profession. But that was the cultural background in the house. Music is a binding factor as if it is a nickname. Across all generations, whenever quarrels have taken place, and they have, they were never on material topics such as the division of property, but more often related to topics on music - which music style is better, how and why. There was no inhibition to listening to any style. In their house, musicians were always welcomed. Mr. Bhimsen Joshi, a world famous musician stayed at P. H. Deshpande's house in Pune during 1949 for 6 months before settling in Pune. That was the love and passion towards music. Harmonium player Govindrao Tembe died in 1955. All India Radio requested P. H. Deshpande to deliver an obituary speech on Pune station and to V. H. Deshpande on Mumbai station on the same day with a time difference of 30 minutes. That was the unique appreciation of the music passion of Deshpande Gharana acknowledged by the Government of India.

GENERATION TREE



Legend

- 1: P. H. Deshpande (son)
- 2: V. H. Deshpande (son)
- 3: Shreedhar H Deshpande (son)
- 4: Prof. Sakharam H. Deshpande (son)
- 5-9: Five daughters including Shashikala
- 1a: Anant P. Deshpande (grandson)
- 2a: Satyasheel V. Deshpande (grandson)
- 4a: Meenal C. Deshpande (grand daughter-in-law)
- 1aa: Rahul Arwind Deshpande (great grand son)
- 1`: Dr. V. S. Deshpande (son)
- 2`: D. S. Deshpande
- 3`-7`: Five daughters.
- 1`a: Padma P. Deshpande (grand-daughter-in-law)
- 2`a: Shreekant V. Deshpande (grand son)
- 1`aa: Shruti S Deshpande (great grand daughter-in-law)