

# GURUJI Padmashree Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty: As I have seen Him

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## Brief Bio-data of the Author



KAUSTUV KANTI GANGULI, born on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1990 in a musical family, had his initial lessons in vocal music at the age of 4 from his grandfather, Late Phanindra Mohan Ganguli & was encouraged by his father Shri Partha Sarathi Ganguli who learnt Sitar and mother Smt. Subhra Ganguli, vocal music.

At the age of 7, Kaustuv became a student of SHRUTINANDAN from the year of its inception that is 1997. Since 2009, he is a Scholar at the ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata under the tutelage of GURUJI PANDIT AJAY CHAKRABARTY.

Having done his schooling in 'Ramakrishna Mission, Rahara' & 'St. Lawrence High School', Kaustuv has done his B.Tech. in Electronics & Instrumentation Engineering under West Bengal University of Technology. He has also publications of papers in the proceedings of The National Conference, COIN-2011, The International Symposium FRSM-2012 and The West Bengal Science and Technology Congress 2012. He is now studying under the Department of Electrical Engineering, IIT Bombay as a Research Associate under the guidance of Prof. Preeti Rao.

In music, Kaustuv got the first place in 'Khayal' both in Ravi Kichlu Foundation Talent Search 2003 and The Dover Lane Music Conference (Young Talent Search) 2008-09. He is the recipient of 'Scholarship to Young Artist' from The Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, in 2010. He is also winner of the President's award in the All India Radio National level Music Competition in 'Khayal' in 2011. He has performed in various concerts in Kolkata, Bhopal, Delhi and Gurgaon.

Presently, Kaustuv is pursuing his project on 'Cognition of Musical Notes & Implementation of Digital Music Library' with a view to combining his knowledge of Engineering & education of Music and Humanity. He is an active member of the 'CompMusic' Research Group of Computational Modeling of World Music in the IIT Bombay team, dedicated for Hindustani Music. Recently, he participated in a workshop of the 'CompMusic' project, on Indian & Turkish music computation research in Istanbul, Turkey.

**A**s the word 'GURU' literally refers to the person who shows the pathway of enlightenment and wisdom from the darkness of ignorance; before I start writing, let me not forget to first acknowledge my first Guru: my 'Parents', who had given me the education of cognition and helped me grow and nourish my power of vision to realize objects and abstracts.

Music is a form of education which we call a 'Guru-Mukhi Vidya' or more precisely, it is such an art form which has produced best results through ages, when a pedagogical structure is followed. Thus, to quote my Guruji, "Music is a subject to learn."

Practically speaking, I believe that any art form is 'Guru-Mukhi', as it has elements which need proper demonstrations and sharing of experience. Moreover, Music is said to be the best and easiest way of worship to reach God, the very form of adoration that needs no formal or material offerings. Then what is that precious element required?

That is what I have been trying to get an answer to throughout the small span of my learning experience and what I have realized is that these factors are something very abstract to listen to. These include proper 'self-realization', 'peace of mind', 'contentment', 'detachment', 'patience', 'self-respect', 'confidence', 'serenity', 'simplicity', 'stability', 'tolerance' and last but not the least, 'surrender'. Simply saying, it needs proper co-ordination between the deep and sublime beauty of the empyrean sphere of mind and the firmament of external world, i.e., a state of evanescence with the welkin of the universe. In one word, I can express it as an introspective progress or simply an 'Inner Journey'.

In the perspective of Music, the musicality or the musical-mindedness does not bind itself within the mere territory of knowing the exact position or frequency of notes, being familiar to a number of 'Raga's or 'Taal's and even achieving adroitness in 'Laya' or adeptness in 'Taankaari'. These are not those qualities that enable one to get license to sail in the ocean of peace, but there are multiple factors associated with this noble attempt of musically educating oneself.

A few of these factors are physiological, psychological, mental and ultimately all these converge together to point to the spiritual development and sustenance. It gets the proper nourishment and shape by stimulating and triggering one's conscience. These are some of the very subtle and elusive glimpses of Guruji's style of educating that elucidate the spiritual aspect of music-learning in the true sense of the term.

I came to realize this truth through the years I had the rare opportunity to accompany Him and witness His life-style and habits of day-to-day life. I would describe Guruji's teaching style in two independent spheres. The first one being the elements of Music that includes demonstration of 'Note's, 'Phrase's, 'Raga's, 'Bol', 'Taal', 'Laya', 'Taan', 'Sargam', 'Vistar' and many more. The second aspect aims to self-development to achieve the state of performing, i.e., flourishing of physical, mental status as well as sense of aesthetic beauty & inspiration. To quote Guruji, "First, we have to create peace, cheer and appreciation within ourselves. Then it's most obvious that it would radiate amongst the listeners present."

**A**fter the short introduction to my article, let me enter straight into the facets of my Guruji's training style, as mentioned earlier. Actually speaking, though I have spotted two broader aspects, it would be a very difficult task for me to distinguish between the subtle particulars of the training we get. This is because of the fact that Guruji makes us realize the concepts of music in a high degree of Philosophical language where there is a feeble delimitation between the two with equipotent co-existence but minimal predominance. This is a kind of state where everything converges to give a deep realization that is often beyond the level of imagination of disciples, as Guruji quotes to us, "Where Science ends, Philosophy begins."

As a dedicated student of Science, I often opt to describe things scientifically, which is of course, appreciated by my Guruji. But, in this article, I am not going to trade-off between the two facets, rather I would try to depict the things as we are taught and also express the beauty of incorporation of Philosophical essence onto it. Let me now focus on some of the salient points I could get among the vast lecture Guruji delivers.

- ✚ As we all know, Indian Music is supported by the backbone of the enriched Indian Culture & Heritage, which leads to the beauty of 'unity within a large diversity'. Similarly, the backbone of Indian music is the tonic pitch or the 'Sa'. Not only that, the 'Sa' bears such an importance in the performance of a Raga that it resembles the gravity of aged and experienced superiors in a traditional Indian family. The families which introduce their antecedents before others make a good impression, similar is the case regarding projection of 'Sa' that strengthens the foundation of the performance by relating with the root or origin.
- ✚ Guruji demonstrates the 'Swara's as living beings that have certain movements, may it be ascending, descending or combination of both. Sound is a form of energy which relates itself with the change of mental state; so the same note sung with happiness and cheer would sound totally different if sung with a sad or pensive mood. The same 'swara' carries the emblem of faith, love and peace, so singing is the easiest way to express one's deepest emotions. If the notes are sung from this realization and insight, it gets the touch of liveliness; otherwise it remains as the skeleton without the charms of life.
- ✚ One of the most special things I have observed is Guruji's style of demonstrating a 'bandish'. First, we are made to utter the lyrics clearly realizing the inner meaning and then recite them in proper scansion of the 'laya' by keeping the beats on hand. Then comes the moment when He sings the bandish matra-by-matra, showing the proper position of phrases. Also He gives us the liberty to recompose His own bandishes to give it a new form, to learn the art of composing and develop sense of proportion. Another special mention is that He never allows us to copy the bandish in writing, but insists us to memorize & by heart it. He teaches us many bandishes of different laya, taal & aandaz of the same Raga to get a clearer view of the mood, character of a Raga and create new routes from them.

## GURUJI Padmashree Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty: As I have seen Him

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- ✚ After some discussion on 'swara' & 'gayaki', let me not forget to mention the importance of 'laya' in a performance; starting from the beginning till the end, even where tabla is not played. Not only that playing the Tabla is an inevitable quality of a singer, he should be capable of achieving the state of playing and singing simultaneously in a good performing level and I have no better example of this expertise other than my Guruji who has also accompanied many great artists on the tabla in concerts. The point of saying all these is not only the fact that one should have a good knowledge of the 'laya', but he should be able to use this sense properly and extract utmost out of it in every part of the performance, may it be a metered portion or not.



- ✚ In view of Guruji's lessons on the use of 'laya', only calculation oriented thinking like executing complex 'Tihai's should not be the ultimate goal of a performer, nor that is a good example of use of 'laya' in a performance. A performer should focus more on 'Aamat' or the spontaneous finishing of a 'vistar' or a 'taan' picking the 'mukhda' and the sense of proportion of the vowels and consonants in a composition. He also makes us understand the difference of gayaki one should adopt while singing compositions of different tempo, worth mention is the 'Vilambit' Vs. 'Madhyalaya' gayaki.

## GURUJI Padmashree Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty: As I have seen Him

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- ✚ Guruji makes us visualize the fact that every single element of Indian music has been originated from the Nature. The way how we should take a 'gamak' or an 'aandolan' is a famous question in every performer's mind, but the answer lies in the natural movements only. He guides us how to develop one's own 'gayaki' from the spontaneous movements of leaves of a tree moving in a breeze or the natural flow of water-currents in a river.
- ✚ We should acknowledge the fact that music is not a property earned and carried through heredity; it needs hard work and sincere endeavour to achieve a certain height to justify the God-giftedness. It is obvious that belonging to a musical family holds a certain advantage of the atmosphere that leads a child towards music; but at the same time, I believe that it is the responsibility of the parents to develop a taste towards music loving and creative thinking at a very tender age of their child.
- ✚ We know from the moral stories, the tale of the spider making its way out keeping patience and maintaining continuity of positive efforts. Similarly, it's a good practice to bind oneself within a small territory to feel the urge to free him from there and thereby finding new ways of 'phrase's or 'taan's in a Raga. Guruji thus describes the correlation of the day-to-day facts with the 'Musical Mind'.
- ✚ Music is a form of on-air 'Painting' that needs a blend of bold and mild strokes of the brush. Similar is the case in music, where we need air as the 'brush' and 'dynamics & modulation' as the master strokes that is the quality of a good musician who utilizes these skills to improvise a phrase in a Raga and discover the same phrase in a new way that listeners can cherish.
- ✚ Another thing I cannot just miss to mention is that how we could realize the 'Knowledge of the feeling of time space' or the existence of the 'laya' even within spontaneous conversations. This is a practice, Guruji used to make our guardians note in the Guardians' Appreciation classes as this would be a recondite practice for the kids; and the true fact is that knowingly or unknowingly I had the beats always going on within my mind, which now I can term as 'Embedded' and I now have started feeling the importance of having that comfort level in 'laya'.
- ✚ Being a student of 'Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home', I could appreciate the Sanskrit 'sloka's, one of which being "Shraddhabaan Labhate Gyanam", meaning 'He who pays respect can earn wisdom' or simply, the person who keeps faith and respect to any person, situation & institution is a perfect person. I have learnt how to respect even the musical instrument in the way of becoming a good musician, as Guruji says, "It is better to remain a servant of the 'Taanpura' throughout the life."
- ✚ Scientific theory & laws always target to generalize the natural happenings, as it remains the truth devoid of any condition or situation. I cannot find a better generalized theory by Guruji, regarding the measure of one's actual dimension for the 'Aakar' as required to call his mother as 'Maa', independent of his age.

## GURUJI Padmashree Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty: As I have seen Him

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- ✚ Not only we get a huge volume of training of solo performance, but we get to know how to appreciate the accompaniment; may it be Harmonium, Sarangi or the Tabla and also we get the training of the ways to enrich our performance by providing a proper space for appreciating the accompanists' mind. We are also taught how to accompany, not by mere following the main artist, but colourising the totality of the performance by adding different flavours onto it.
- ✚ One big area of thought, I think every musician bears in his mind is the idea of Gharana. I would not go into the details of what the term actually means, as depicted by the legendary musicians through ages; but rather I would like to mention that how open-hearted is our Guruji regarding the conservativeness usually a practice noticed earlier. We are taught how to improve our quality of judgmental ability to accept good things from every possible source, provided that we can justify them to our own conscience.

I believe, I could illustrate some of the salient points of the training style of my Guruji. Now I would like to focus the spot-light on a few of my memorable moments and some striking facts which I could realize with my growing maturity that I can only term as 'life-time' lessons. So, let me start with, may be the 'Charjaa' class.

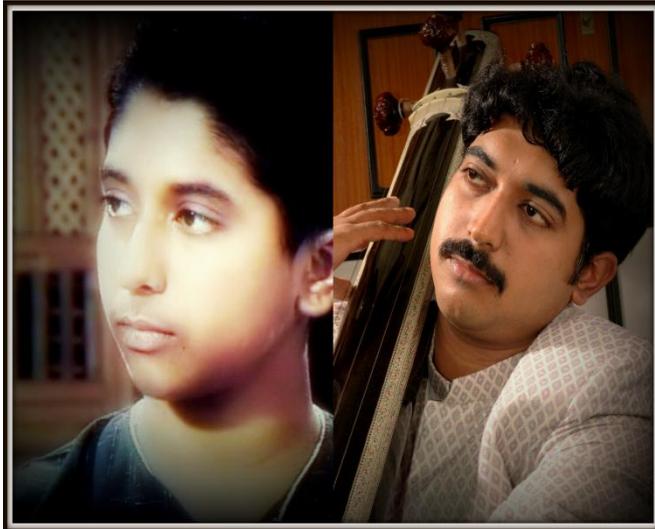
- ✚ Earlier I had read about the age old Aryan 'Gurukul's, where the 'Shishya's were taught every kind of education starting from physical, mental to philosophical know-how's. I could not have experienced a better one to resemble that till I had the rare opportunity of attending the first-ever 'Charjaa' class arranged by Guruji in His musical institution 'Shrutinandan'. I still cherish each and every moment of those three days I spent with Guruji in close vicinity for the first time in the then situation as early at my age of 13 in 2003. Not only I could learn a scores of new dimension of performing, also I can remember the 'Pranayam', 'Yoga' sessions and especially the unforgettable eatables with a big glass of milk every night.
- ✚ I could not at all have achieved in music whatever small I have, without witnessing my Guruji's life-style. I am actually in a fix, which points to mention, specifically because I myself am an outcome of all the practices He advises; starting from proper diet including timings like early dinner to the extent of physical exercises. I consider myself fortunate enough to have had some opportunity to accompany a most traditional Bengalee person at home, though being an internationally acclaimed musician. I cannot find any better example of simple-living and high-thinking than my Guruji Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty.
- ✚ Now staying in Mumbai, being a Research Associate of IIT Bombay, I miss a whole lot of things like the Music room at Guruji's home; I would feel like stepping on the stair-case of musical notes when I used to enter there. Another very important touch I remember is Guruji's hands on my head which is a big source of energy for me and of course Gurumaa's motherliness with an affectionate smile.

## GURUJI Padmashree Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty: As I have seen Him

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- ✚ As I have always had an inclination towards academics, I felt encouraged when Guruji used to award prizes on our academic achievements too. Also I felt more interested when Guruji taught us simple things more scientifically, establishing correlation between objects already prevailing in nature. Whenever I have tried to teach someone, these experiences provided me a huge bank-balance of examples.
- ✚ The last but not the least, I would like to mention a concept which needs a deep level of realization to implement is that, how to achieve a high position in the society staying down to earth also, diluting all traces of ego and self-centeredness. I have tried my best to learn how to bow down to others to achieve a state, “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high”, to quote Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.

I have till now described a whole lot of things that I have experienced being under the kind guidance and tutelage of my Guruji for the last 16 years. But, let me justify the title of this article, “GURUJI Padmashree Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty: As I have seen Him”. Then what does this ‘see’ing actually mean? Is this ‘see’ing mere believing? Let me take the opportunity to reveal the fact that the answer to this question also I have got from



my Guruji. In every language, I would mention about Hindi here, that being our National language; there are sayings like, ‘do & see’ (kar ke dekho) or ‘taste & see’ (kha ke dekho) or ‘go & see’ (jaa ke dekho) and plenty more of this kind of examples that relates every action with this ‘see’ing. This seeing is not the mere reflection of an image in the human retina, but it has got an impingement of much deeper impression onto the human-brain that encroaches placidity to the mind and it’s capable of storing much more information than physiological vision, so we can perhaps name it as the ‘Inner Vision’. This ‘see’ing has neither a beginning, nor an end; no specific scientific tool can process or analyze this happening; neither there is any controller of this fact. It is only the internal Philosophical energy that can describe this eternal essence of good life. Our eyes are not the receptors here, but only the qualities of a human-being can rejoice this truth.

**T**here is a saying, 'Music is like an Ocean', although I find a prominent difference between the two. The ocean has a depth that can be measured by some scientific means while it may have a few abysses within it that is unpredictable in nature, but music is an ocean the profoundness of which is totally immensurable in the true sense.

Being in the close vicinity of this large ocean of music for nearly last two decades with the touch of blessings of one of the 'King's of this great domain, I have just started feeling like getting an opportunity to have access to a small arena of it. But, now I can understand that, touchwood, how great blessings of the Almighty I have had in this small span of my life: being under the affectionate palm of my Guruji, following Him like a shadow. I can feel from deep realization that how much tough it is for a personality like Guruji to bear the restlessness and infantile nature of the children of those tender age and how much patience one has to have to make an attempt of building the future generation of Indian Classical Music.

Nonetheless, at the end I wish to formally express my gratitude to my parents: my Father, who has been incubating with His big wings of support since my existence, in every possible way as a tower of strength, may it be physical, financial or inspirational & of course my Mother, who has always kept a minute eye on the pathway of my growth and has incorporated the moral values within me and ensured their proper nourishments. Without their active and cumulative support, I might not have completed my worship with this article as a small token of respect to my Guruji, as there are a many number of incidents that they reminded me from the fond memories of my childhood, of my association with Guruji.

At the end, I wish I could truly become the 'torch-bearer' of the lessons of my GURU as an able musician and also as a proficient human-being. The Sanskrit version of the word student: 'Chhaatra' literally means one who holds the canopy over the head of the Guru; I would consider my life a successful one if I could take myself to an empyreal height to become a maven and dependable disciple of my Guruji. On that very note, I would like to draw an end to this article which did garland me with divine pleasure all through the journey down memory lane, garnished with the sublime beauty of the true bindings of the 'Guru-Shishya Parampara'.