



Krishna Naad

The Legacy of Kundalguru



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Krishna Naad The Legacy of Kundalguru

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CHAPTER I
THE DAWN AT GWALIOR

In the opening year of the twentieth century, the historic city of Gwalior stood as an unyielding citadel of Hindustani classical art. On the fifth day of August in 1901, Balkrishna Natthubhaiya Umdekar entered this world in Gwalior, born into the household of the eminent musician Pandit Natthubhaiya Umdekar. The environment into which he was born resonated with the ancient cadence of Hindustani music, providing the child his initial exposure to the vast, intricate ocean of classical swar. His father's vocal mastery commanded deep reverence throughout the region, and young Balkrishna's earliest days were surrounded by the continuous, disciplined practice of raga-vidya.

Yet, adversity descended upon his early childhood with swift, unsparing severity. Before he had attained his sixth year, both his father and mother were taken by death within a short span of time, leaving young Balkrishna completely orphaned. Taken under the frugal guardianship of his maternal uncle, Pandit Mahadev Shastri, the young boy was plunged into an existence marked by acute material indigence. The comfort, security, and paternal guidance that ought to have nurtured his youth vanished entirely, leaving him to navigate the world without financial backing or social privilege.

Deprived of fortune, Balkrishna recognized that his true inheritance lay in the musical lineage of his ancestors. His maternal uncle, Pandit Mahadev Shastri, himself a devout disciple of Bala Dixit Ji, became his very first preceptor, laying the sacred foundation of his musical journey.

Following his initial grounding under his uncle, his musical education advanced under the formidable Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan Sahib.

In the freezing hours before dawn, when the winter air of Gwalior turned incisive, the young boy walked barefoot across long, dark miles toward his training. Possessing no warm garments or heavy woolen mantles to shield his small frame from the bitter frost, the child gathered stray puppies along his path, pressing their warm bodies against his bare chest. This living heat sustained his circulation during those arduous morning pilgrimages through the silent, frozen streets. Upon the passing of Khan Sahib, Balkrishna was taken under the wings of Balasaheb Guruji, a direct disciple of the legendary Haddu Khan Sahib. Under Balasaheb Guruji, his sadhana deepened immensely as he received profound, multi-faceted training not only in vocal music, but also in the sacred art of the Rudra Veena and Samagana.

Recognizing the young prodigy's limitless capacity for knowledge, Balasaheb Guruji informed Balkrishna of the establishment of the Gayan Shala at Madhav Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in 1917, advising his pupil to enroll and broaden his academic horizons. Obeying his guru's vision, Balkrishna joined the Gayan Shala, where he came under the guidance of the celebrated Raja Bhaiya Poonchwale. When Balasaheb Guruji subsequently passed away, Balkrishna continued his advanced musical pilgrimage by visiting the residence of Raja Bhaiya Poonchwale, absorbing the intricate nuances of the Gwalior tradition under his tutelage. Through these long years of rigorous discipline under extraordinary lineage, he developed a vocal instrument of uncommon aesthetic purity and immense acoustic power, combining profound melodic sweetness with a natural projection capable of carrying distinct, unamplified tonal nuances to listeners seated more than a hundred feet away.

CHAPTER II

THE VISION, THE POISON, AND THE
WILDERNESS

Armed with an unprecedented wealth of musical lore and institutional vision, Pandit Balabhau Umdekar took a monumental step in 1927 by establishing the Chatur Sangeet Academy. The institution was founded to bring rigorous academic structure and pedagogical discipline to Hindustani music while preserving the spiritual sanctity of the traditional gurukul system.

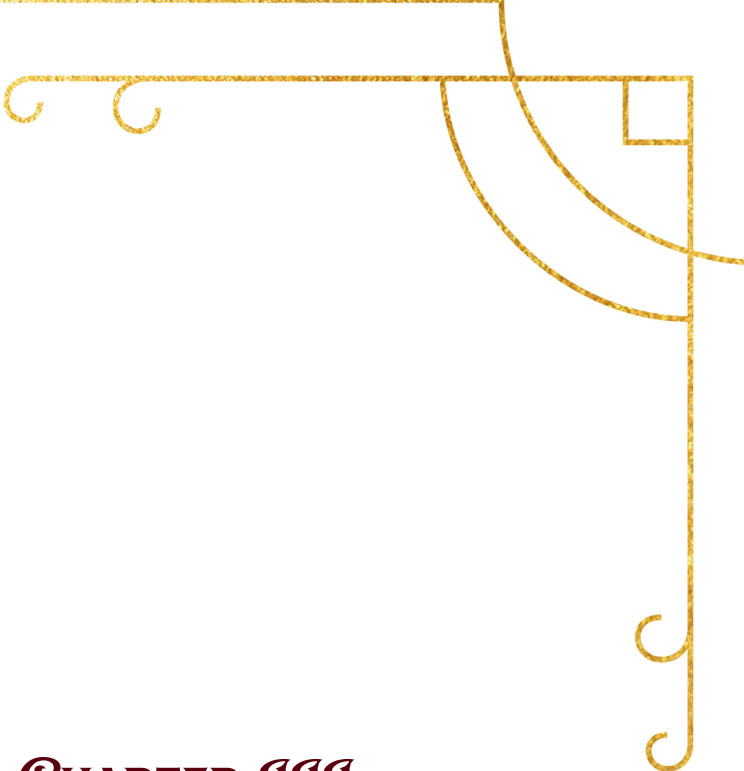
By 1938, his artistic stature had reached its absolute zenith. He was officially appointed as a court musician to the royal Scindia court of Gwalior, rising to become one of the most celebrated and highly compensated vocalists of his era. Ever Since , He was given the title of Rajdarbar Gayak Pt.Balabhau Umdekar , and was also honoured with the title of Gayanacharya His residence was adorned with golden vessels, fine ornaments, and royal honors, reflecting his immense professional success. It was during this glorious period around 1938 that his seminal work, Raag Suman Mala, was first published, sending waves of admiration throughout the musical and academic circles of India. He was also invited in Germany for his Concert at a time when even travelling abroad was rare , and musicians performing abroad was even more rare.

Yet, this period of soaring acclaim was suddenly shattered by a sinister act of professional malevolence. A rival musician, consumed by envy and hiding behind a mask of friendship, invited Balkrishna to a meal. Secretly, a toxic dose of vermilion, or sindoor, was mixed into his food. The chemical compound acted as a brutal poison, tearing through his vocal apparatus and causing catastrophic damage to his vocal cords. Within hours, the golden, resonant voice that had mesmerized royal courts was extinguished, reduced to a dry, broken whisper.

For a maestro whose entire existence was constructed upon the foundation of sound, the loss of his voice was a catastrophe beyond measure. Yet, refusing to succumb to public despair or defeat, Balkrishna turned his back on the city, the royal court, and the comforts of his home. He retreated into the uninhabited, dense forest terrain of the Bhau Maharaj Hills near Gwalior.

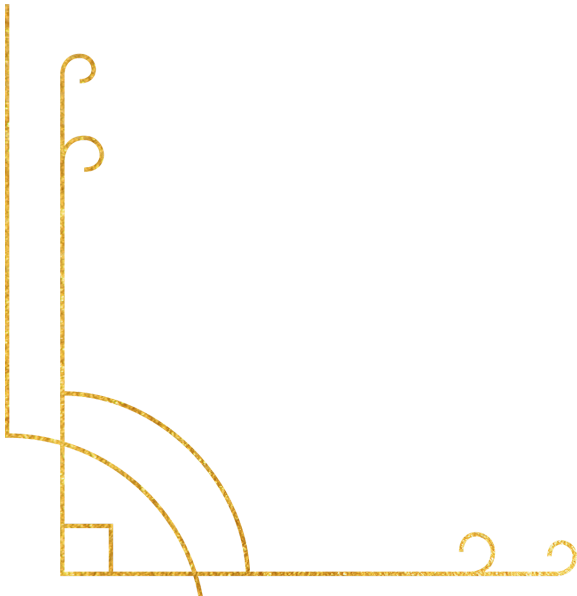
In those isolated hills, surrounded by wild nature and stone cliffs, he lived for six long months as a solitary hermit. He subjected his damaged throat to a relentless, daily riyaz, working from the most fundamental to gradually repair the scarred tissue. Day after day, in total isolation from human society, he engaged in this intense sadhana, seeking to align his broken voice with the natural frequencies of sound.

On one fateful morning, as the sun rose over the forest canopy, Balkrishna struck the fundamental note. The blockage dissolved, and his voice burst forth with an ethereal, thunderous resonance far greater than what he had possessed before the poisoning. He returned to Gwalior and walked into the Scindia Darbaar, where he sang before the court in a display of vocal power that left the royal assembly in silent awe. He was then honoured greatly by the court and his life continued per usual, consisting of giving numerous concerts and programs across India.



CHAPTER III

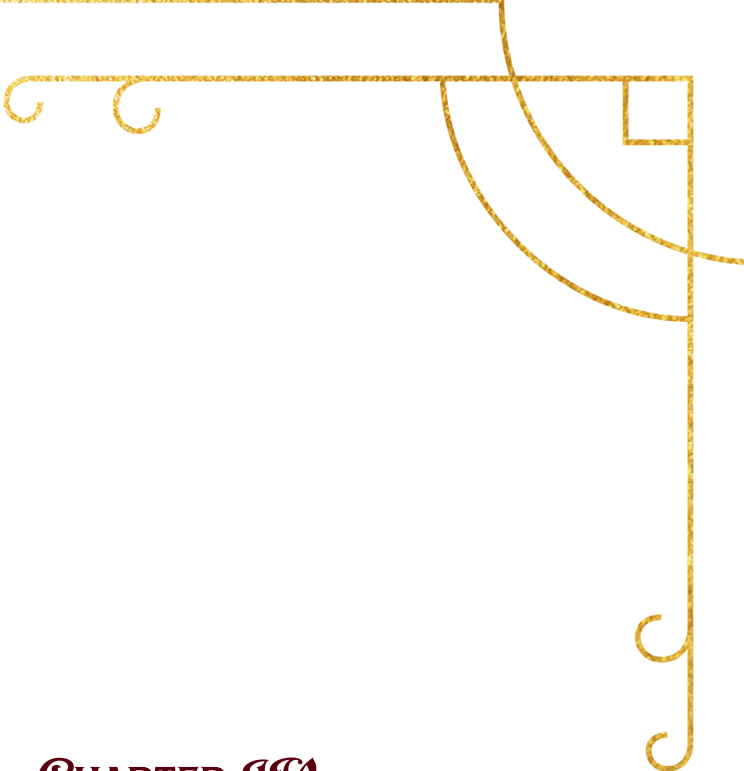
THE SACRED INTERVENTION OF KUNDALGURU



A subsequent event further elevated his stature within the classical tradition, linking his name forever with the miraculous. Following a soul-stirring vocal performance at the revered Lakshmi Narayan Temple, a sudden, severe setback once again caused his health to deteriorate rapidly after he was made to fall dangerously due to an intentional push. Day after day, his physical strength ebbed away, until attending physicians exhausted their medical knowledge and declared that his life could no longer be saved by human intervention.

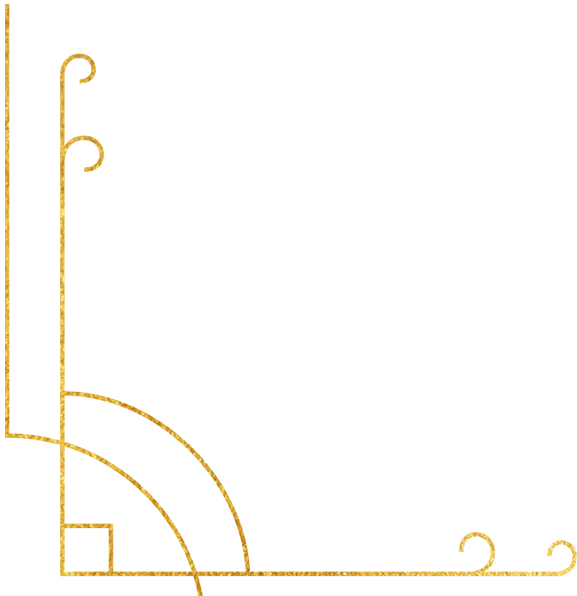
His wife, Radhabai Umdekar, herself a proficient sitarist, remained steadfast at his bedside in constant prayer, refusing to abandon hope. During the darkest hours of a critical night, a wandering, saintly mendicant appeared at the threshold of their home. Without introducing himself or offering any worldly explanation, the holy man produced a pair of sacred rudraksh kundals which were blessed by mantra chantings, and handed them to Radhabai, instructing her to place them against her dying husband's ears.

Radhabai followed the mendicant's instructions immediately. Upon the application of the sacred ornaments, the fever broke, Balkrishna's physical strength returned, and within twenty-four hours he experienced a complete recovery. When the family rushed outside to seek the visitor and express their gratitude, the mendicant had vanished into the night without leaving a trace. When the Maharaja was informed about this he sent his entire army to search for this divine saint but he was nowhere to be found. From that moment forward, the classical music community abandoned formal titles and began addressing him with deep reverence as Kundalguru, the master healed by divine grace.



CHAPTER IV

ACADEMIC MONUMENT AND MASTERWORKS



Kundalguru recognized that performance alone was insufficient to preserve the vast heritage of Hindustani music for future generations. The Chatur Sangeet Academy, which later expanded into the Chatur Sangeet Mahavidyalay (University), became a revolutionary beacon of learning. Under his vision, it became one of the earliest music institutions in India to introduce structured doctoral research frameworks and academic evaluations for Hindustani music, attracting dedicated scholars and disciples from across the nation.

Alongside his institutional leadership, Kundalguru was a prolific scholar and author whose published literature remains fundamental to musicology. His major works include:

Raag Suman Mala (Parts I & II) — His magnum opus containing rare original bandishes, republished in 1989 and brought out in a historic two-part edition in 2022 by the Madhya Pradesh Department of Culture and the Ustad Allauddin Khan Sangeet Evam Kala Academy.

Sangeet Prasadini (Parts I & II)

Ganesh Stuti

Vishnu Stuti

Sama Stuti

The Mutual Relationship between Music and Literature

Raga Sagar & The Creation of Swara Sagar

Raag Suman Mala stands as a monumental work of scholarship and composition. The text reflects his deep command of Sanskrit literature and his profound devotion, while successfully introducing intricate South Indian, or Carnatic, ragas into the North Indian classical canon. Recognizing its extraordinary pedagogical value, premier universities across India , including the University of Rajasthan, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, University of Kota, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University, Mahatma Jyotibai Phule Rohilkhand University, and Maharaja Ganga Singh University , have prescribed Raag Suman Mala as a core text for postgraduate and doctoral music programs. His instructional lineage produced eminent scholars and performers who carried his teachings across the nation, including Pandit Sharadchandra Shridhar Paranjape, Pandit Bhaskarrao Sangit, Pandit Babu Shastri, Pandit Gangadhar Bhagwat, and Pandit Raghunandan Sant.

CHAPTER V
THE ETERNAL LINEAGE

Pandit Balabhau Umdekar Kundalguru passed away on the eighth day of June, 1968. His home had always functioned as a sanctuary where music was lived as a continuous discipline, and his six children all grew into accomplished artists who carried his legacy forward:

Smt. Sangeeta Kathale (Suman Umdekar), a celebrated classical vocalist.

Smt. Vimal Belapurkar, an accomplished classical violinist.

Smt. Indumati Telang, a distinguished classical sitarist.

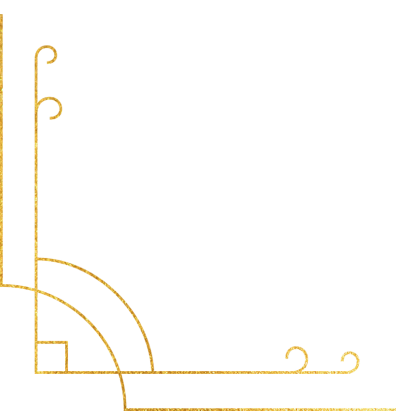
Smt. Kamal Mandal, a soulful classical vocalist.

Pt. Madhav Umdekar, a renowned classical vocalist.

Pt. Shriram Umdekar, a Top-Grade artist in Rudra Veena, Surbahar, and Sitar, who continues to organize the annual Pt. Balabhau Umdekar Smruti Sangeet Samaroh in honor of his father.

This artistic lineage continues to flourish through subsequent generations of musicians and scholars who preserve and expand the tradition: Mrs. Shruti Adhikari (pioneering female Santoor exponent), Vidushi Shashwati Mandal (Gwalior bandish gayaki exponent), Dr. Radhika Veenasadhika (World's pioneering woman exponent of the Vichitra Veena and founder of the Veena Venu Art Foundation), Smt. Geetika Masurkar (distinguished classical vocalist), and Mr. Koustubh Umdekar (gifted sitar exponent). His Legacy Continues through Veena Venu Art Foundation which is the Renaissance of Chatur Academy of Indian Music.

Thus, the sacred river of sound that began in the icy mornings of Gwalior flows undiminished through time, carried forward in every note struck and every raga breathed by his lineage. Pandit Balabhau Umdekar 'Kundalguru' lives on , not merely as a monument in the annals of classical history, but as an eternal, vibrating presence in the heart of Indian classical music.



KRISHNA NAAD

The Legacy of Kundalguru

Based on the Life of Gwalior Rajdarbar Gayak Pandit Balabhau Umdekar 'Kundalguru'

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Pandit Balabhau Umdekar 'Kundalguru' belonged to a generation for whom music was not merely performed, but studied, lived and entrusted to the future.

A distinguished exponent of the Gwalior Gharana, he was the revered Rajdarbar Gayak of the Scindia royal court and was regarded among the foremost vocalists of the country. His life embodied rigorous taleem, profound scholarship and an unwavering dedication to Indian classical music. As the founder of the Chatur Academy of Indian Music and Chatur Sangeet Mahavidyalay, he established an enduring centre of musical learning. His landmark work, Raag Suman Mala, preserves his original bandishes and continues to guide performers, scholars and advanced students of Hindustani classical music.

Krishna Naad: The Legacy of Kundalguru presents the life and living inheritance of an acharya whose musical vision continues through his compositions, disciples, institutions and generations.

About the Author

AaroHi Budhkar is the great-granddaughter of Gwalior Rajdarbar Gayak Pandit Balabhau Umdekar 'Kundalguru'.

She is associated with the Veena Venu Art Foundation, which is leading the renaissance of the Chatur Sangeet Mahavidyalay established by Pandit Balabhau Umdekar in 1927.

Under the guidance of her mother and guru, Dr. Radhika Veenasadhika, AaroHi is receiving training in the rare art of the Vichitra Veena. Alongside her musical and academic education, she works towards creating awareness about Indian Veenas and other traditional Indian instruments, contributing to their preservation, study and wider recognition among future generations.

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