

# PART 3 – INTERVIEWS

## 3.

### Guru Banamali Maharana

#### Attendees:

BM: Guru Banamali Maharana  
RT: Dr Rekha Tandon (Interviewer)  
CM: Dr Chitta Ranjan Mallia (Translator)

BM: In our village, Mohan Sundar Deb Goswami had (deity) Lord Gauranga at his house. He had a Rasa Party too, and from our village, he took all the talented children for his Party.

I was 5 years old, and during that period I did the role of Bala Krishna...

And I would wear the costume, a dhoti and crown, just like baby Krishna. And Kelucharan Mohapatra was Yashoda.

RT: He was Yashoda? Oh!

BM: I had an elder brother named Kunja Maharana. He too was part of Mohan Sundar's Party.

Like this, I did roles there. Then when I grew up a little more, I did the role of Madhu.

There I observed there was no *tabla*.

RT: What were the instruments that were played there?

BM: Only the *khol* was played in the Rasa Party.

I looked at the *khol* and very much desired to play it!

But I was a little boy, and when I tried to play, my arms were too short... even so, I played anyway.

Then Mohan Sundar Deb Goswami came and said, 'Hey, you! What are you playing? Play! Play!'

'Dhi-KitaSa-ma-ta' and other such phrases he told me to play.

He used to treat me as a grandson...

His son was Gaurab Sundar Deb Goswami.

I kept doing roles, doing roles and two or three years went by.

By that time, Mohan Goswami had a high quality Rasa Party.

Back then there were... earlier there used to be more people from our village.

Maybe there were Ekadasia, then Ramo, and Maguni... Das, these people were present.

Then, after a while, Mohan Goswami's health deteriorated. He passed away and the Party broke up.

After it broke up, there was the Annapurna Theatre. And in the theatre there were three groups: 'A', 'B' and 'C'.

I joined the 'C' Group... they took me and kept me there.

Bauribandhu Mohanty was the General Manager of 'C' Group.

The 'C' Group, though, didn't last very long.

So, after that, I went to the Annapurna 'A' Group, and there I saw a lot of *tablas* were played...

the *khol* was played, er... the *pakhawaj*... (I mean) *mardala* was played...

RT: Guruji where was Annapurna 'A' Group?

BM: At Puri.

RT: One moment, when were you born?

BM: 5 years.

RT: No. In which year were you born?

CM: Now he is 63, so you can calculate...

BM: So I saw there were many *mardalas* and *tablas*.

A lot (*of them*)... I had high interest!

At that time, though, I used to sing. (But) I said, 'I will play!'

However, Mr. Mohanty told me, 'Until your voice breaks, you cannot play the drum!'

So I thought, 'If I can make my voice break, I'll be able to play!'

What I did was, there is Goddess Ramchandi at Puri, near Laxmi Talkies, and I always went to Her and offered lamps,

praying that my voice would break!

One day, during Durga Puja, in our village was Agadha Maharana at that time,

And he used to play the *khol* well, and the *tabla*. He asked me to sing a song.

I sang 'Rathi Sukh Saare...' (*from the Gita Govinda*), and in the phrase 'Nakuru Nithambini...',

where you go to a high note, at that note I couldn't sing anything!

My heart was very happy! I felt that Thakurani (Dedvi) had finally heard my prayers!

After that, when we returned, everyone was very sad. 'What happened? You can't sing anymore!'

Until then, the Annapurna Theatre Manager had always treated me as such a star. He wouldn't even let me pick up a chair!

But after my voice broke, he began ordering me, 'Hey you! Go and get that chair! Do this! Do that...!'

I started feeling very bad. Someone would call me here, someone would call me there...

Finally, I was made gateman for the shows!

Kabisurya... (*indistinct*)

Kabisurya Brindavan Patra was someone who played the *tabla* in the theatre.

He would do a comedian's role as well.

One day, there was a scene where Kabisurya was writing, and Raj Jema was dancing...

Then, what happened was, the curtain went up, but suddenly came down again!

I asked myself why this happened, so being at the gate, I ran inside to see.

Hari Panda, the Music Director, was there. He liked me a lot...

So I asked him, 'Why did the curtain come down?'

'Brindavan Patra has got the runs,' he said, 'and had to leave, so who will play?'

I said, 'I will play!' He said, 'Huh? You will play?'

But he always believed that one day I would play, because I was always drumming on my chest with my fingers.

So I sat down and played the *tabla*, and from then on I became the theatre accompanist.

As an accompanist, whatever was there, I played. I played the *khol*, the *dholak*...

Whatever skin instruments there were... the *tikia* I played... I played them all.

One day, there was a play called 'Kansa Kabata', and for that, lots of instruments were needed.

There was the *tikia* – it is called *jodi lagera* too.

Then the *khol*, the *dholak*... many such things were there that I played.

One day, I thought to myself, 'Although I can play everything, what I am playing I have no idea about...'

Which instrument to play? How to play it? What to play? None of this...

So I said to Brindavan Patra, 'Big brother, I am very sad about this...' I was about 12 or 13 by then.

'What I play I don't really know.' 'But you play well,' he said.

What happened was, the person who was playing earlier, he told me to play as my playing was sweeter.

Even with training, he could not play what I could, though I was untrained!

I did this by memorising patterns and, like that, play whatever was required of me.

He had learnt under Kshetra Mohan Kar, who was a great percussionist from Puri.

I asked him, 'Please take me to him,' but he said, 'Taking you like this will not be acceptable.'

In this drama 'Kansa Kabata', there are a lot of things.

Ah! There was one role, that of the writer of 'Kansa Kabata'.

Jokingly, I told the author, Benutosa Tripathy, 'Sir, you write so much but you don't write anything for me!'

'So you want to do a role?' he asked. 'Yes, why not?' I said. I was joking, and then left...

He, though, already began writing a part for me.

What role did he write?

The role was a Muslim, who was an Ustad... and my disciple was Brindavan Patra, who did comic roles...

Now, his wife can't hear anything, she is deaf. If she puts on a hearing aid device, only then she can hear.

So, I am the Guru, and Brindavan Patra is my disciple, and he doesn't like the *tabla*. His wife doesn't like it too.

The first scene starts like this: The Guru is wearing a beard and spectacles.

There is a threaded cot on the side, and to the cot's leg is tied a hen!

Then there are two *tanpuras* in two corners of the room, and two *tablas* lying around too...

The Guru is there pumping the stove and cooking rice.

Brindavan Patra enters as the disciple and asks, 'Guruji what are you doing? Why are you cooking yourself?'

'Who will then cook for me?' I reply.

'Then, when will you finish cooking, sir?' 'No, it is almost done.'

The disciple says, 'We should go home.' 'Yes, let us go.' I say.

The disciple then says, 'Guruji, today the class will go well!'

'Why is that?'

'I have hidden my wife's hearing aid device!'

'Now that I have hidden it, she won't be able to hear us playing the *tablas*. She will be deaf!'

'Fine!' I say.

'Guruji, the *Vilambit Ektaal* is not happening. Can we start with that?'

'Yes,' I said, and gave him the *theka* of *Vilambit Ektaal*.

He had one *tabla* and I had one *tabla*, and I recited a *bol* for him to learn...

I was teaching like this, when his wife comes and asks, 'Where is my hearing aid?'

'Na, na, na...!' and I continue teaching him...

????????? (*indistinct*)

'What nonsense! Get out!' he tells her. She can't hear anyway! 'Get out! What nonsense!'

The Muslim Ustad is of short height, wearing a long *kurta* and holding a stick since he is the Guru.

He has a long beard, a skull cap and spectacles.

With this, Brindavan Patra's Guru came to see me.

He sees there are so many instruments - He was a classical musician.

Seeing me play so many instruments, he asks, 'Who is this person playing?'

'He is playing well. He can play the *dholak*...' and so on.

As the drama ended, he asks Brindavan, 'Who is that boy playing the percussion?'

'He plays really well. The *dholak* and so many other instruments he can play...'

'Who is he?'

'Sir, he is a small boy.' 'Call him here, I want to see him!'

Then he saw me and said, 'You play really well.'

To which, Brindavan Patra says, 'This boy is wanting to learn from you.'

'What will he learn from me? He is already playing well.'

'Yes, he plays well but he says he does not know from which part of the instrument, which sound is produced.'

'Like Na, Sa, Dha... how are they produced? This he wants to learn from you.'

'Okay, fine...'

So I went to him. But after 6-7 days, he didn't teach me anymore.

He had many other students there to teach...

He was a Post Master, and would return home at 5 P.M.

After taking his bath, he would start his classes. All his students would attend, I being one of them.

At 7 pm, I had to return to the theatre for my job.

One day, when I got up to leave, he stopped me and asked, 'Why do you always get up and leave exactly at 7 pm?'

'Well,' I said. 'You are not teaching me anything, and I must go now to the theatre and work.'

'Oh I see.' And he gave me a *paran* to study.

'If you can learn this in two days,' he said, 'I will teach you the *tabla*.'

And what was the *bol*? (*he then recites it...*)

That much, and I had two days to do this.

This was my exam! And since the sound disturbed others, I woke up at two in the morning, wrapped up my *tabla*,

And went and practiced under a tree at the Annapurna Theatre.

???????????? (indistinct)

RT (*interrupts in Hindi*): Did you write a notation? Did you write it, or you just heard it and practiced it?

BM: No, just heard it. Then where the *baani* begins in the composition, that he taught me.

*(he recites the composition...)*

Should I play it? But I'm doing it on a *pakhawaj*. Okay...

This what I just played is the the *pakhawaj* version. In those days, I played the *tabla* version...

He was very pleased and said, 'If you learn all the *thekas* in Hindustani (*music*),

'I will write them for you, and if you play all these, then you will know all the *baanis*.'

He said, 'What you played here...'*(he then vocalises a few thekas...)*

'A lot of combinations are there in this *baani*. Play these *thekas* and you will know what I mean.'

This I did, and when I went to give the exam, everyone had gathered, his daughter too, who was a very good singer.

'Today there is no class,' he said. 'Instead, Banamali will take his examination.'

Listening to this... Ah! There was one theme in *Ada Chautal* *(he recites...)*

He had taught me this *theka*. *(he continues reciting...)*

The tempo at which he had taught me, I played double that speed.

He was very happy! 'See, see!' he told everyone. He was delighted and began teaching me the *tabla*.

Then, what happened...

After a while, I thought, 'Now I have learnt *tabla*, I won't stay in Annapurna anymore. I want to leave...'

'I want to go away.'

So, I went to Kelubhai in Cuttack. He told me, 'Come over here.'

But I didn't want to... I wanted to go away somewhere. Back then I had not seen anything beyond Cuttack.

I wanted to go away somewhere.

*There he shared a house with Odissi Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra in Oriya Bazar, Cuttack since their families were related through marriage...*

At that time, Shanta Prasad Das had come to play *tabla* at Shaheed Nagar.

He asked me, 'Do you want to listen to him?' 'Yes,' I said, and we went and saw him playing *tabla*.

After listening to him, I got even more crazy!

I wanted to go somewhere but I had not been anywhere beyond Cuttack!

But my brother (*Kelubhai*) told me to stay and continue practicing *pakhawaj*.

So he would go and teach dance to all the students at Cuttack, while I practised.

Then one day Kala Vikas Kendra was opened, and I joined as an accompanist.

There, my salary was fifteen rupees.

Do you know how long Odissi dance used to be at that time? 10 minutes, 12 minutes, 15 minutes, like that...

At this point, he (*Kelubhai*) left for the Youth Festival.

RT: In Delhi?

CM: Yes, in fifty...

BM: So he went there, leaving me with the responsibility for Cuttack, Chaudwar and Bhubaneswar.

I used to take all three classes – dance classes.

I did so much of this, that that was all I was doing. Then...

Biju Patnaik was at that time Chief Minister, and that is when the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya opened.

Dhiren Patnaik was Special Officer.

When he was Special Officer, what happened, Raja Mahendra, the King of Nepal, was coming on a visit to Bhubaneswar,

and a program was being organised at the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya.

The music was being composed by Bhubaneswar Mishra.

He said, 'I am composing the music, but who will play it?'

Nobody there was able to play it.

'Call Bana, he will play it...'

At that time, I was at Kala Vikas Kendra, and he knew about me, so what to do?

Thus, at the same time as calling me, a post as accompanist was immediately created.

Then somehow I passed for the post of an accompanist!

On 13<sup>th</sup> December 1965 I joined Sangeet Mahavidyalaya as a dance accompanist...

First, though, they tell me I have not submitted my joining report.

They then said, 'Do the rehearsal first, then submit it!' Which I did, and I have continued ever since...



I then played with whoever were the top artistes in India.

During the month I had a regular job. Pankajbabu (*Pankaj Charan Das*) was a lecturer in dance.

Deb Babu (*Deb Prasad Das*) was there too, and also a new accompanist.

For twenty days of the month, I was away, travelling everywhere with Sanjukta Panigrahi.

For ten days I would be there (*in the Institute*).

All the time travelling, travelling, travelling...

There were even complaints in the Assembly! Questions were being asked!

There was a very strict man at Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. He wanted me suspended!

Mehtab was there – Harekrishna Mehtab was the President.

In those days, at Bombay, there was the Kal Ke Kalakar Festival.

Vijay Narayan was there, and he used to do all sorts of programmes...

classical programmes, dance programmes... a lot of programmes.

One year, he decided to do a whole lot of *jugalbandhis* with dance...

Odissi with Kathak, Odissi with Bharatnatyam, Odissi with Kuchipudi... Odissi would be with everything.

Sanjukta Panigrahi and Roshan Kumari - you must have heard of her, Roshan Kumari.

Her father was a great *pakhawaj* player.

The rule was, you could do whatever you liked, but for fifteen minutes there has to be a *jugalbandhi*.

For the *jugalbandhi*, I said to him, 'Tomorrow is the programme, so give me fifteen *bols* now,

And overnight I will convert them into Odissi *baani*.

Then we will make it like Sawal Jawabi.

That way it will be easy for you since you don't know Odissi speech.

After that, what happened...

At that time, Zakir Hussain was playing for Roshan Kumari. He hadn't finished his metric then.

For the programme, everything was prepared, the rehearsal and everything,

And I told him, 'At the end, you must play one *bol* of mine...'

Back then, Kathak and we... *(were playing fast bols)* 'Tha thei...' I am talking about the end of the programme...

*(indistinct...)*

CM: Please teach us that technique...

BM: It was 'Thei-thei inda-kadathaka thaha-mutha hatha tha...'

*(he starts playing and describing sounds...)*

The 'tha' was not played *(like this)*. It was played like this.

'Thei'. With two hands you get 'thei'.

'Inda...' There was no system for 'inda'. No *baani*.

'Inda': 'Thei-thei inda-kadathaka thaha-mutha hatha tha...'

*(he plays this bol...)*

This is the basic form. Once this is understood, you can then find ways of embellishing it.

Like this... *(he demonstrates...)*

Students, try playing 'thei-thei inda-kadathaka...' Play it...

**END**