

Chimote's innovation pleases audience

By MOHAN NADKARNI

INNOVATING sounds has been a consuming passion with many a musical genius.

Speaking of Hindustani music names like those of Swami Parvatikar of Karnataka, Ambhalal Sitaria of Gujarat and Bhishmadev Veda of Rajasthan easily come to mind. Nearer home is that of the veteran, Manohar Chimote who gave a lively performance on his self-innovated "Samvadini" at a well-attended concert on Wednesday.

The programme was organised by a team of his ardent votaries to mark the founding of an institution, aptly named

Music

after the instrument. The object is to promote the instrument, which is a variation of the harmonium, as an independent medium for solo playing on par with the sitar, the sarod, the flute and the like.

Indeed, it all speaks of Chimote's undoubted ingenuity and craftsmanship, backed up by his unrelenting dedication and endeavour, all of which have gone into the making of his innovation. Apart from redesigning of the keyboard of the conventional harmonium, he has changed its Western-oriented tempered scale to the *gandhar*-based tuning of our melodic music.

He has also sought to adapt the techniques of sitar-playing and vocalisation to his instrument. What commands admiration is the way the veteran has tried to overcome the inherent

limitations of the original key-board instrument, without seeking any compromises in intonation.

The spell of soft, jingling tones that emanate from the strings sounds truly exciting in its effect. But the impact is not as abiding, if only because its tonal virtues, specially *alaps* and *meands*, have still to find greater scope for more effective instrumentation, like in the sitar and other concert instruments, mentioned earlier. The result is that the novelty and charm of his playing still remains hamstrung by obvious technical constraints.

But the 58-year-old virtuoso, who forsook his professional career as an accompanist three decades ago, is still engaged in his sustained pursuit towards perfecting his instrument!

Coming to the repertoire, Chimote began with a rather non-descript *raga* called *Bairadi*. Rendered with brief prefatory *alap* and *jod*-type sequences, he followed up with a *gat* composition in *vilambit* and *drut*. The *drut* was, incidentally, longer than the *vilambit*. The melody has a quizzical character — it was a curious mix-up of *Marwa*, *Bibhas* with *Shudh dhairat* and *Mand*. It omitted *madhyam* and made use of *komal rishabh*.

Despite its half-hour treatment, no coherent musical form emerged out of it. Novelty was perhaps its virtue.

Frankly, one felt that the spirit of the occasion really called for an appropriate, solemn melody like *todi* as the opening item. Of course he did play *Gujari Todi* as his third number in *vilambit* and *drut*, but only for only 15 minutes. In between, he presented an all-too-brief *drut bandish* in *Bhatiyar*.

The post-interval fare comprised a more detailed *Mishra Pahadi*, followed by a tune based on Marathi *stage-song*. And it was *Mishra Pahadi* that brought out the best of his musicianship. This also, incidentally, seemed to show that it is such light breezy numbers that bring out the best of the instrument's potential, and not melodies of profound, serious character that need long, deliberative exploration.

While Chimote received superb support from his disciple, Bhanu Joshi, young Tanmoy Bose, who had played so well with a sitarist a few weeks ago, seemed rather ill at ease in his *sangat* this time. The horrible acoustics of the venue at Chhabildas auditorium also detracted, in no small measure, from the listening enjoyment.



PANDIT MANOHAR CHIMOTE