

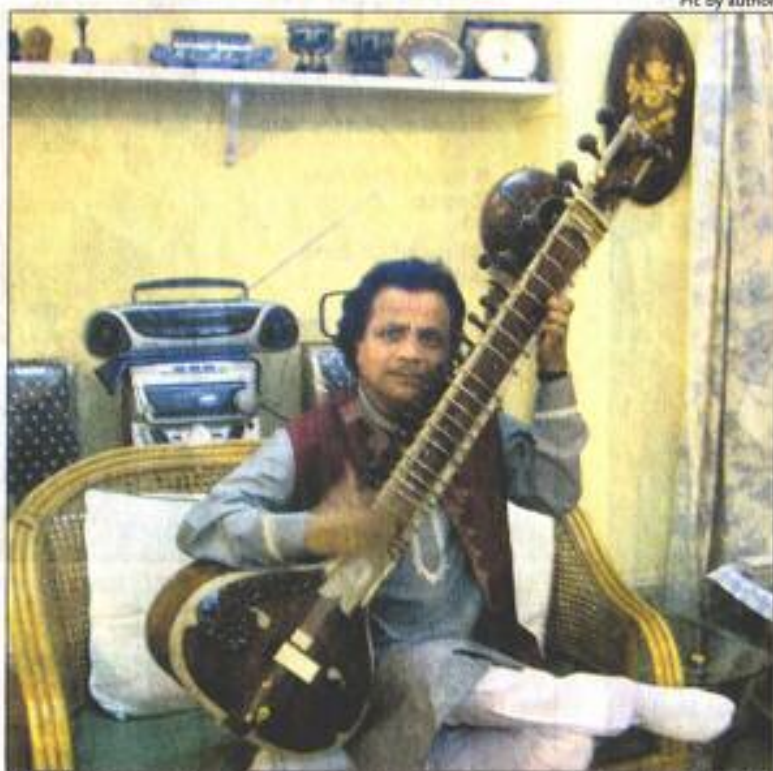
He has taken sitar to Japan

Sitar maestro Chandrakant Deshmukh tells ARATHI MENON that he has taken upon himself the task of popularising the sitar in Japan.

Capturing Dr Chandrakant Deshmukh with his sitar on the camera is a tough ask. Every time he sets his fingers on the strings, melody flows and with its rhythm, sway his head and body. Words like 'cheese' or 'pause' do not work with him. "I am sorry but I can't help it. This is the bonding I share with my soul-mate," says he. And you are left to sigh over a photo — shaken and blurred.

Deshmukh took to the sitar at a very young age. As a child, his nimble fingers earned him the title 'wonder boy'. Under the tutelage of maestro Pt Ravishankar and his wife Annapurnadevi, this prodigy could only score further. Once after listening to him play the sitar, the Pandit remarked: "Umar ke saath baaja bhi badaana" (You should improve your music with age). These words, Deshmukh says, have travelled with him and motivated him ever since.

As he progressed from *paltas* to *ragas*, awards and accolades followed. In 1976, Rajasthan University honoured him with the title Sangeet Vibushan (sitar scholar) and in the



Pic by author

Chandrakant Deshmukh uses the sitar as therapy for the mentally challenged and the differently-abled.

same year, Soor Singar Sansad, Bombay, awarded him the title Soormani. That is not all. The rest should be given a skip for a detailed listing is exhausting.

Born and brought up in Pune, Deshmukh has made Japan his home for over 10 years. He has reasons to leave the place where his heart lies. "My guru (Ravishankar) made India popular in European

countries and the USA. Then it was my turn to spread the essence of India around the world and I have chosen Australia and Japan for the mission," says he. Why Japan? "Popularising Indian music in Japan was very challenging. Americans and Europeans are quite familiar with our culture now. But for Australians and Japanese, India is still a voodoo-land where snake charmers and

strange practices thrive," says he.

Talking about Japan, Deshmukh says Japanese music is very primary and highly influenced by western music. "Japanese accept only the best. They have now approached me for some collaboration with Indian music."

"Japanese enjoy music in a different way. In India, you get instant response from the audience when they say 'wah, wah...' while you play. Japanese do not know this, they do not even know *talas*. But if they enjoy your music, you will invariably have to do an encore," says he. Among the *ragas* he played for his Japanese audience, he says it is Kirwani that has hit off well with them.

After playing sitar to his satisfaction for decades, this maestro decided to do justice to his lineage. Hailing from a family of Ayurvedic practitioners, Deshmukh started playing sitar for the mentally challenged and differently-abled in Japan. "The first change you notice is in their sleep pattern. Even the most hyper-active patient would start sleeping after a couple of sittings with the music. Over a period of time, the changes become more evident," says he. Deshmukh also has a couple of patients in India whom he visits every now and then.

Deshmukh enjoys his visits to the hospitals as much as his concerts. But he says, for any artiste, playing for himself gives that extra. "In concerts, I can close my eyes and sing but in therapy sessions, I have to observe the expressions of the person opposite. That makes all the difference," he says.