

## BOOK REVIEWS

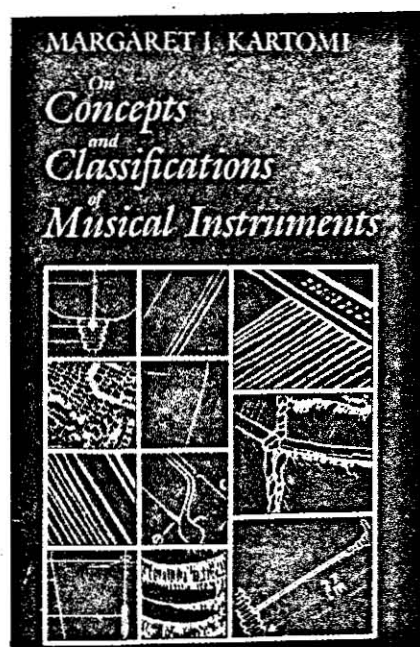
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### On Concepts and Classifications of Musical Instruments

Margaret J. Kartomi

The University of Chicago Press,  
Chicago, 1991

There are those who believe in Ethnomusicology as a distinct and definable subject area rather than merely a convenient term to accommodate and protect students and researchers whose interests lie outside the more traditional confines of music theory and history. These believers will by disposition place high hopes in comparative studies of 'musical thought'; they will find it inherently interesting to map the methods by which different societies define and mould their musical cultures on different principles, with varieties of social organization, aesthetic premises, classification systems and, in so many senses, 'ways of looking at' music. For some, the exercise of comparison is almost enough in itself—an accumulation of similarities and differences, through which perhaps one might evaluate afresh the premises on which one's own understanding is grounded. Others will wish to probe more deeply within a particular musical system. Music is, however autonomous, not created or expounded in a vacuum; what we find in any



particular tradition of musicological thinking will, obviously, be related to other intellectual and artistic notions within the same culture; the attempt to comprehend and define a musical system may sometimes be enlightened by reference to extra-musical ideas, and conversely music may help to illuminate some features of literary, linguistic or scientific discourse.

Margaret Kartomi's present study straddles the line between these two pursuits, which might be termed the

comparative and the interpretative; in the present reviewer's opinion it offers, as a consequence, both more and less than the zealous reader feels is promised by the introductory chapters. The central concerns effectively laid down here are (1) organology (the study of musical instruments), (2) classification itself, and (3) the application of (2) to (1). Even given the recent growth in reference literature on organology, Kartomi has distinct contributions to make, especially in those areas where her research has been primary, e.g. Indonesian music, but also as a source guide to many other systems of instrument definition and classification, European, Asiatic, Oceanic, both ancient and modern, and from various levels of literature and oral, and 'classical' and 'folk' systems. There are some errors, and where I am able to judge I have sometimes found the information somewhat eclectic and in places undigested, but this is not to deny the usefulness of much of it in the central chapters.

Kartomi's explicit programme is, though, a more anthropological one, for it is with the very nature and the procedures of classification itself that she aims to set the agenda in this book. Here we are introduced, or perhaps more often reintroduced, to questions of why human beings need, or like, to classify at all, and the bewildering range of known classificatory systems has to be itself subjected to a classification—a short appendix could have dealt amusingly with this aspect of the work. Distinctions are drawn between taxonomies, paradigms and typologies, and two 'cognitive directions' are opposed to each other—downward grouping, in which the

classifier is considered to be moving by steps from a more abstract to more 'specific' level, and upward grouping, where one starts with a mass of specimens and builds up 'increasingly more abstract' classes. It is, though, possible for a single classificatory model to be viewed in either cognitive direction, and it can be fruitful to look beyond the classification itself to the musicological discourse that surrounds and employs it. Perhaps more fundamentally, the various systems which Kartomi examines are used as evidence for diagnoses of musical thought more generally defined. An alluring aim here must be to locate music, musicality, and musical 'value' properly within broader cultural structures and perceptions. Kartomi is modest enough to admit that her book is only a beginning, despite its richness of data and detail from so many organological areas.

It is in its general and theoretical statements that some readers will feel the absence of penetrating judgements and conclusions. The final chapter entitled 'The Seamless Web' is more a restatement of diversity and variety than a convincing argument that we have a really coherent subject here in its own right. Perhaps this is to demand too much: after all the author has provided much material here with which to test and apply those models of classification which have been devised and defined by biologists, taxonomists, anthropologists and others. Also it is made once again clear that classifications serve many different purposes, and there is a two-way relation between function and system.

JONATHAN KATZ

**The Theatre of Yesterday  
and Tomorrow:  
Commedia Dell'Arte on  
the Modern Stage**

James Fisher

The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992

408 pages, Price not mentioned

James Fisher's well-documented study is devoted to *commedia dell'arte*, a theatric genre of mainly Italian origin. The music-dance-drama package identified as *commedia* assumed a definite form during the 16th century, even though some of the features of *commedia* are traceable to earlier eras and other traditions. Features such as depiction of stock-characters (e.g. Harlequin), improvisation of dialogues as well as stage business, recourse to typical dramatic situations, conflicts or tangles attained such a stature in the *commedia* that it became "the rarest of the rarest of theatrical forms—a non-literary theatre that emphasized the skill of the improvising actor" (p.9). Fisher maintains that the original Italian inspiration proved its theatric durability as well as pliability because it moved from country to country and prospered. Further, it attracted most of the modern, new and revolutionary theatre personalities—whether they were playwrights, actors, set-designers or musicians. Finally, Fisher feels that *commedia* has the inexhaustible capacity to generate creative pulses in theatre irrespective of time or clime. This is the background against which he titles the book 'The Theatre of Yesterday and Tomorrow'.

Fisher goes about his task methodically. The first eight chapters describe how *commedia* fared in Italy, Spain,

THE THEATRE OF  
YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW  
*Commedia Dell'Arte on the Modern Stage*

James Fisher

The Edwin Mellen Press  
Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter

England, Russia, eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Germany, France, and the United States. Ten pages at the end argue about the impact *commedia* made on other aspects of contemporary culture, particularly the fine arts, film and television, literature and music. An extensive bibliography and notes, which follow, complete the story. Though the fifth chapter (dealing with eastern Europe and Scandinavia) is rather thin, the author generally succeeds in bringing out aspects of *commedia* which proved theatrically liberating in different countries in various degrees.

Fisher's thesis, persuasively put forward, gains considerable support from the view and work of some major

figures in theatre from the recent past. Among those who enthusiastically welcomed commedia as a form of great theatric potential are Luigi Pirandello and Eduardo de Filippo (Italy), Jacinto Benavente, Federico Garcia Lorca (Spain), Edward Gordon Craig, Harley Granville Barker (England), Vsevolod Meyerhold, Alexander Tairov and Eugene Vakhtangov (Russia), Max Reinhardt (Germany), and Jacques Copeau (France). Apparently the influence of commedia extended over various departments of theatre. Fisher therefore holds up commedia as an all-embracing philosophy of theatre considered as experience. It may help to summarize why major theatre personalities had high regard for commedia. Pirandello admired the function of masks (p.22), the improvisatory acting playwrights' complete absorption in the quality of the performance and the accent on communication with the audience (p.25), which involved doing play within a play (p.38). He also noted the emphasis on the illusion of the actors' creativity as contrasted with any realistic happening (p.39). Giorgio Strehler viewed commedia as "a unique and marvellous phenomenon: a moment when the actor, having no good texts, had to take the entire responsibility upon himself" (p.43). Fo emphasized the significance of the audience, his involvement with it as an actor, and the audience's engagement in the subject of the play (p.55). Lorca stressed that all of the arts should combine in the art of drama (p.71).

Craig insisted: "I am strongly inclined to think that the theatre of Europe is the Italian theatre" (p.78). He also felt that commedia actors were

responsible for "helping Shakespeare, suckling Moliere and creating Goldoni" (p.84). For Meyerhold, commedia "became the central inspiration in his quest for new formulas to combat realism" (p.111). He further believed in the centrality of the actor who combined the skills of the mime, the athlete and the improviser (p.112).

Finally, Reinhardt, who sought to make what he perceived as the original comedic spirit come alive to a modern audience, valued the actor as poet (p.171). Music and light were two unifying forces in his huge "symphonic productions." He was so comprehensively involved that he seemed to usurp the work of the playwright as the actor (p.180)! Brecht's interest in "depersonalizing" actors led him to clowns and clowning and thus indicated his liking of the comedic vein. Further, his working in a sharply caricaturing manner, partly learned from commedia... techniques, was also notable. Copeau urged "each of his actors to find a specific stock character directly inspired by commedia masks, with the intention that each actor would play a basic stereotype" (p.214).

Instances can be easily multiplied, though it is hardly necessary to do so. That so many should think a particular theatric mode so significant testifies to its essential fecundity. Fisher's historical account is both lucid and impressive. However, he is less illuminating when it comes to analysis. For instance, all admirers of commedia have been selective in their assimilation of comedic influences. Expectably, they 'deviated' by giving different weightages to different theatric strategies and components. Their

varied cultural backgrounds and individual approaches in a way compelled them to claim some freedom from a free form! These meaningful deviations or modifications needed explanations in this book. Pirandello's stance that the kind of theatricality he was advocating meant an "improvising playwright rather than an improvising actor to realise a comedic spirit" certainly necessitates a discussion. The fact that Pirandello rehearsed for several days in order to improvise on a theme should prompt one to examine the kind of improvisation that he aimed at. The aspects of commedia included in the syllabi for dramatic training at the Bologna Theatre School or Tag Teatro company—usefully or otherwise—also demanded some analysis. One would have wanted to know how the evanescent and nuance-filled improvisatory aspects of commedia could be taught without taking away their essential character. It should also be obvious that a playwright's perception of the commedia mode would differ from that of an actor or a set-designer, etc. These different readings of commedia should have been analyzed at some length.

The less impressive impact of commedia on England, or the 18th-century attempts (in France) to revive commedia through recourse to written texts, or Meyerhold's attempt to 'bind' the entire performance with music, call for explanation, analysis, and conceptualization. Unfortunately, these are not offered in Fisher's book.

The reason for the author's weakness in analysing a free form perhaps lies in his failure to attend to two realities of performance. Firstly, in all performances both verbal and non-

verbal channels of communication operate, and no form, style, or school of performance would yield its secrets unless both these channels are examined in depth. Secondly, the 'freeness' or otherwise of a form is in relation to the prevalent performing norms of the culture to which the form belongs. Therefore, in discussing a mobile or boundary-transcending mode such as commedia, it is extremely important to explain the causes that lead to deviations contrasted with examples of conformity. Fisher is more keen on finding resemblances than on placing them in the perspective offered by differences. The book should prove absorbing reading for Asian theatre-lovers as they are verily surrounded by free forms.

ASHOK D. RANADE

### **Humour and Communication in Contemporary Marathi Theatre:**

#### **A Sociolinguistic Perspective**

Mahadev L. Apte

Linguistic Society of India, Pune, 1992

127 pages, Price not mentioned

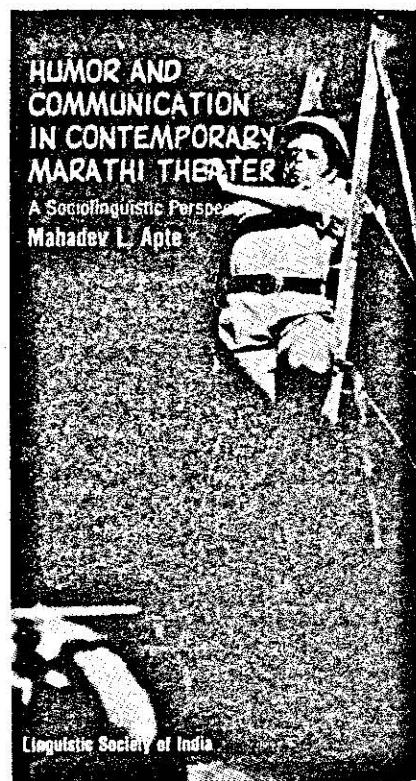
One always says or hears it being said of Marathi theatre criticism that it is overly text-oriented. And yet, when one prepares for a task of dramatic analysis, one finds that we hardly have any serious studies of dramatic texts. Theatre is a cultural activity which should attract the attention of sociologists and cultural anthropologists, but our academicians have not

really concerned themselves with the study of this interesting group communication.

In the circumstances, this work by a linguist is welcome addition to books on Marathi theatre. It is based on the R.S. Katre Memorial Lectures delivered by the author in 1990. Apte has first established a strong theoretical framework but has also related his own experience of Marathi theatre performances to his theoretical perspective.

Before analysing Apte's framework in this book, I would like to mention a short article by the same author which I happened to read long ago. The article in *Etnofoori* (1) 1988 (pp. 15-23)—'I am Pure, you are Polluted! Who is Clean and who is Dirty? Humor in Ritual Behavior among Marathi Speakers in India'—made an attempt at discovering substantive socio-cultural specificity in Marathi humour. It used a small sample from the autobiographies written by Brahmin and upper-caste writers. It is a cliché to say that underpinnings of humour—incongruity, distortion, exaggeration—all involve creating a misfit between socio-cultural expectations and the potential antecedents of humour. But what the author does is to establish a framework with the help of which one can understand the stimuli that are contrary to cultural assumptions regarding role, status interactions, values, etc. I refer to this earlier attempt by the author because he seems to have been consistently attentive to social context, which is necessary in order to understand theatrical performance.

In this book the first four chapters lay down the conceptual framework



regarding communication, language, humour and theatrical performance. The fifth chapter presents a detailed analysis of linguistic humour—humour that exploits phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic attributes—and the interrelationships of these attributes in the structure of the Marathi language. The sixth and seventh chapters deal with the multitudinous ways in which humour has been shaped by language and the relation to the socio-cultural system. The section ends with some observations about the linkages between humour and Maharashtra society and culture. All the chapters are illustrated with examples



from texts and performances of contemporary Marathi plays. The author is well aware of the fact that a play is a *multimodality* text, and as such the written version has natural limitations.

Apte is aware of the limitations of confining himself to a single discipline in dealing with his subject. In his chapter on 'Theoretical and Conceptual Framework', he has defined many approaches like *ethnomethodology*, *pragmatics*, etc. which are primarily concerned with language usage, but has himself adopted a broad *sociolinguistic* approach utilizing a variety of perspective from different disciplines.

He has found a relevant concept for the discussion of humour in Goffman's 'key' and 'keying'. Key is defined as "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else". This process of transformation is called *keying*. Any time there is transformation it adds a 'layer' or 'lamination' to the frame. Goffman in his analysis talks of two layers: the innermost which engrosses the participant and the outermost which determines the status of the activity. This approach proves relevant for theatre. The author has synthesized the function of language as described by discourse analysis as transactional and interactional, with the sociolinguistic approach to language as an activity which transmits information primarily of factual and propositional nature.

In the chapter on 'Humour of Speech Play in Contemporary Theatre', the author has chosen ample and apt examples from Marathi plays

to illustrate punning, rhyming, malapropism, reading errors, etc. But what the analysis fails to do is to establish a link between the texture of a play and dramatic statement. In the next chapter on 'Socioculturally Shaped Verbal Humour', too, there are a variety of examples. Humour based on incongruity is broken further into sub-categories but the analysis does not distinguish between its operation in a play by Kanetkar and another by Alekar. It leaves out altogether the various functions of parody in communication. Though the author has methodically mentioned some caveats in the introductory remarks, limiting his analysis to contemporary Marathi urban theatre, one wishes he had chosen some contrastive examples to distinguish various communicative patterns. When he discusses code switching—especially code mixing—he might have related the linguistic categories to the social-mobility phenomenon, which is relevant in traditional Indian society.

Ending his analysis with some observations on the sociocultural implications of humour, the author balances his views on the ethnocentric and universal behaviour of Marathi-speaking people with the perspective of an academician trained in a descriptive discipline.

The book should be keenly read by theatre people and by academicians interested in communication and society. One must thank Mahadev Apte for his effort. I hope a scholar who has insights into theatre as a community activity utilises Apte's research for further explorations in this area.

PUSHPA BHAVE

## Pillars of Hindustani Music

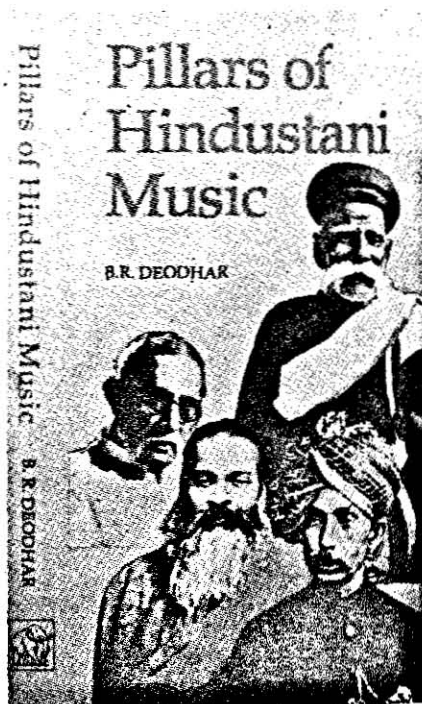
B. R. Deodhar  
(Tr. Ram Deshmukh)

Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1993

303 pages, Rs 225

The late 19th and early 20th century was the golden age of Hindustani music, dominated by great artists who lived, breathed and dreamt music. Among them were Balakrishnabua, Ichalkaranjkar Bhaskarbua Bakhale, Alladiya Khan, Allauddin Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Bundu Khan, Faiyyaz Khan, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Kesarbai Kerkar.

In the pages of this remarkable book, these musicians come alive again. Written by Professor B.R. Deodhar between 1948 and 1958 as a series of 80 articles in Marathi for a magazine published by the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, this selection of 21 profiles is marked by a wealth of detail. A student of Pandit Paluskar, Professor Deodhar came into contact with many important figures of the period. He cultivated their friendship, seizing every opportunity to draw them out about their lives and ideas. As a result, the book is full of interesting anecdotes and conversations, evoking a sense of immediacy and intimacy. We feel we are listening in as Professor Deodhar cunningly engages the testy scholar Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande in a discussion about a popular performer. We share his damp discomfort and absorption as, seated in a leaking taxi at Marin Drive with Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, he hears the maestro attempt to synchronize his



Such colourful descriptions coupled with an expansive spirit of inquiry makes the book good reading. A noted musician and teacher himself, Professor Deodhar is insatiably curious about everything, so we get insights not only into his subject's family backgrounds and musical ancestries, but into the main characteristics of different styles of singing, raga grammar and methods of *riyaz*.

Besides this, there are glimpses of the period's socio-cultural milieu. Most of the artists in this book were born around the middle of the last century, when British rule had been firmly established and Indians were being forced to come to terms with far-reaching changes in life-styles and



occupations. However, the traditional art of music was largely unaffected; it still relied on rich patrons to support it. Musicians did not enjoy much social prestige and the insecurities of their existence made them jealously guard their treasured compositions—an attitude that still lingers.

Given this background, one can only marvel at the tenacity of those musicians who braved reluctant gurus, poverty, and family opposition to master their art. A lucky few like Faiyyaz Khan, who came from an illustrious musical family, escaped the gruelling process, but the experience of Balakrishnabua Ichalkaranjekar, who spent many years travelling in search of his muse, was more typical. At his first guru's house, Balakrishnabua had to perform every menial service and contend himself with picking up compositions on evening walks. His second guru taught him systematically but was too poor to feed him so Balakrishnabua had to go begging for his food—an accepted way of life for many Brahmins but one that he found humiliating. Fortunately, despite these hardships, Balakrishnabua later imparted his hard-earned knowledge generously—free to his male students and at a fee of Rs 30 a month to his female students.

On the whole, the selection of profiles, though weighted in favour of singers, is broad, including even non-

musicians such as instrument-maker Faridsaheb Sitarmaker. Among musicians, there is a good balance between outstanding performers of the time and those associated with significant developments in music, such as Alladiya Khan, who pioneered a new style of singing. Surprisingly, Krishnarao Pandit, a doyen of the *Gwalior gharana*, finds no place in the book.

Sadly, these majestic personalities truly belong to a bygone age. It is hard to imagine that the present era, with its altered life-styles and expectations, will produce their like. In fact, one episode poignantly illustrates the growing divide between traditional and modern India: Baba Sinda Khan, the son of Amir Khan, lay dying in Bombay's St. George Hospital. One night, he called the nurses and doctors in the ward to his bed, intending to repay their kindness to him by regaling them with some beautiful *cheezes*. The busy medicos heard him out for a bit. Then, intending of course to be kind, they admonished him to conserve his energy and went about their business. Baba Sinda died that night.

With stories like these and erudite reflections sprinkled throughout, this well-produced book has something for everyone and is a significant addition to the literature on Hindustani music in English.

JESSICA JACOB