

BOOK REVIEWS

Music Research: Perspectives and Prospects

(ed.) R.C. Mehta
Indian Musicological Society,
Baroda, 1995
92 pages, Rs 150

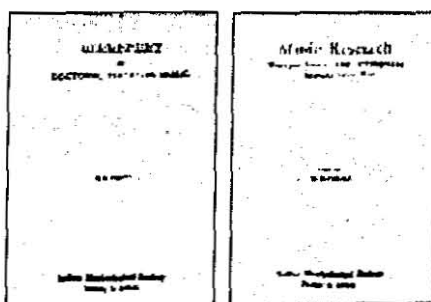
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Directory of Doctoral Theses in Music

(ed.) R.C. Mehta
Indian Musicological Society,
Baroda, 1995
74 pages, Rs 150

The two publications under review are obviously related. One is a collection of diverse presentations on perspectives and prospects in music research, the other is a directory of doctoral theses in Indian music in Indian and foreign universities. The first is expected to provide fresh ideas about what music-related research should achieve! Both are edited by Prof. R.C. Mehta.

In her prefatory remarks to *Music Research*, Dr Prem Lata Sharma interestingly observes that newness has traditionally never been the crux of research in India, unlike in modern days (p. 1). Obviously, the view is based on the fact that textual commentaries and interpretations of seed-texts far outnumber research works which



are not so described. However, the observation is more interesting than convincing, because this kind of closed definition of newness allows no role to conceptual research! The ground is, however, firmer when she states that music research in the modern sense has a history of only about four decades in Indian universities. She makes valid points about evolving a suitable methodology to deal with oral tradition (p. 2). The desirability of intensive study of song-corporuses is well noted (p. 3). Her remarks about the futility of categorizing music as tribal, folk, etc., may not stand scrutiny because structural and qualitative, and therefore experiential, differences in these musics rebel against identical research frameworks, conceptual complexes and treatments, whether in research or performance.

Bimal Mukherjee's short presentation foresees more and more experiments in orchestral and choral music as also the need to research into these possibilities (pp. 13-14). Geeta Mayor argues that the *raga*-idea has the potential of remaining constant and yet allowing innova-

tions (p. 17). S.A.K. Durga covers established ground while outlining the ethnomusicological perspective in music research (pp. 20-29). Shakuntala Narsimhan raises some refreshingly new questions by pointing to a pattern in Hindustani borrowings of Carnatic ragas (pp. 30-33). In a brief analysis she enumerates how, from the 72 *melas* and the 12 *chakras* of the Southern system, ragas from *chakras* 3, 4, 5, 10 and 11 alone are borrowed by Hindustani musicians. She concludes by attributing subjectivity to the process, but it is clear that she has touched upon an important research theme. Arvind Parikh and Arvind Mulgaonkar make similar points about music researches to be carried out in Sitar and Tabla respectively (pp. 34-35). S.S. Haldankar stresses the necessity of standardization of ragas—an age-old theme tackled by many from Pandit Bhatkhande onwards. While his position on concentrating on performance in the presence of an audience is valid, the rest of his statement about how to carry out the research falls between two stools—of following a lab model and/or relying on performance as an act (pp. 46-52). He is neither clear about the experimental mode he wants to set up to examine the mood-music relationship, nor does he show an awareness of the criticism of the inadequacy of Dr Deva's early research model (which Haldankar refers to) in this respect. G.H. Tarlekar's remarks on the 'researchal' significance of Sanskrit texts on music (pp. 53-59) are confined to emphasizing the utility of ancient texts to bring out the historical perspective of music in India.

Perhaps the most well-wrought paper in the collection is by Subhadra Chaudhary on the *tāla* aspect of Indian music. In a limited span (pp. 60-69), she touches on many important themes related to *tāla*. Beginning by distinguishing between *margi* and *deshi tālas*, she draws attention to the early and closer connection between prosody and music in matters of temporality. Further, she notes the gradual change in the connections of terminology formulated in the traditional *dashaprāna* concept. She does not over-

look the essentially different approach revealed in the Manipuri and, to some extent, Odissi *tālas*. She would have done well to dwell longer on the different expressions or manifestations of the *tāla* philosophy necessitated by differences in performing preferences for specific timbres in different historical periods. Sitanshu Ray's observations on the importance of Tagore's remarks (stray as well as more sustained) on music are valid, but he fails to focus on the reasons why Tagore on music can be instructive as well as provocative (pp. 70-73). N.C. Khandekar's presentation gives some idea of work being done on simulation of Indian ragas. He rightly points out that the activity is, as yet, a virgin field in India (pp. 74-85). Suvarnalata Rao's plea for proper recognition of research *per se* is likely to touch sympathetic strings in many hearts in India (pp. 86-89)!

Taken together, the collection does not engross or enthuse the reader and leaves one wondering whether it is beneficial to treat isolated ideas as academic presentations!

The second publication is a directory and thus has a different utility. Covering the period from 1950 to 1993, it affords a glimpse of post-independence attitudes and concerns in music research in universities. The editor's admitted failure to include research done in 'deemed' universities is certainly a serious shortcoming as the number of these researches is considerable and one may find a listing instructive. The data-gathering lacks meticulousness—many details are missing, in too many places. The editor rightfully refers to difficulties faced while eliciting correct information from the sources themselves!

All those familiar with the Indian university scene in doctoral research in the performing arts are aware of the extremely uneven standards at every level. One can only commiserate with the editor! Not much editorial input is revealed in this book — apart from university-wise chronological listings of scholars registered for research in Indian universities, a rather simplified growth index of such studies, and information on doctoral studies at universities abroad.

Comments on the most favoured themes, language biases, or preferred periods, etc., could have helped in showing a pattern in research activity in Indian music.

Both the publications could have been subjected to more rigorous proof-reading!

ASHOK D. RANADE

**Bhashan-rang:
Vyaspeeth ani Rangapeeth**

Ashok D. Ranade

Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1995

278 pages, Rs 160

Ashok D. Ranade has written treatises like *Sangeetache Saundaryashastra* (Aesthetics of Music), dictionaries like *Keywords and Concepts in Hindustani Music*, and now has written a manual (in Marathi) titled *Bhāshan-rang*, which would roughly translate as 'the colour of speech'. It is easy for a scholar and a professor to write treatises and dictionaries, but it is difficult for him to take up the schoolmaster's task of writing a manual. (Gone are the days of Bharata-muni, who—and this cannot be a coincidence—is Ranade's favourite.)

What is this manual about? It is about the often used and more often neglected thing called the human voice. It is about that sphere about which very little is spoken and even less practised: voice-culture. There are thirty small chapters with a big section of selected passages for exercises at the end of each chapter, but reproducing the contents page would be unfruitful. The book tells you how to listen to your voice and to other voices and sounds, how to take care of it and use it to your best advantage. Naturally, it talks about pitch, volume, timbre—the basic parameters of voice. But it also gives you information about each and every phoneme of the Marathi language. The author takes the help of the alphabet (*bārākhadi* as it is called in Marathi), but talks about phonemes. And from



this stage he slowly takes you to the morphological level (joint words and words supposedly difficult to pronounce!); the syntactical level (complex structures, long sentences); and the semantic level (inner feelings reflected in soliloquies and the 'meaning' of speech uttered by a 'mad' character). While at it the author also tells us about the nuances of Marathi prosody. By this time the book is no longer only about voice-culture, but is saying something about the long-forgotten art and science of rhetoric.

The book has a do-it-yourself look, but brief descriptive theoretical information precedes the examples and exercises in each chapter. This information is general and strictly descriptive; it does not become analytical or interpretative usually. This is not Ranade's nature or style, so it must be his choice here. One feels that the author has located his target readers; e.g., one of them could be a young theatre enthusiast who is, say, working in a bank.

The author deals with a wide range of topics. He describes the structure of the voice-producing mechanism, giving anatomical details of the

jaw, mouth, lungs, etc., as well as the voice-receiving mechanism, the ear. He talks about the *ashta-sātviks* of Bharata. He deals with common faults of the human voice as well as things like posture and speed of speech. One gets a feeling that the author should have been more choosy because then he could have concentrated on some aspects more thoroughly. While reading the book, one often feels that here the author really wanted to say something more.

This book is untranslatable. Had it been only about voice, this would not have been the case. But it is about speech as well. And especially about Marathi speech. Many a time we hear the complaint that there is no material available on a particular topic in a particular Indian language, say, Marathi; which implies that such books are available in English! But in the case of *Bhāshan-rang*, it could only be written in Marathi. The nature of the book is not pan-Indian, it is language-specific. It is not *mārgi*, it is *deshi*.

The book is well produced, but there are some horrible printer's devils. For example, the chart of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is incorrect. The publishers are innovative, as has been proved by their previous publications as well as the present one, hence one expected that such a book would be accompanied by an audio-cassette carrying some demonstrations. How much can one 'read' on voice?

As has been said above, apart from voice, the author deals with speech, and he has given a big range of speech exercises. He has selected various speech varieties very carefully. This selection includes different styles of prose, examples of metrical verse, 'announcements' like *birudā-vali*, *khadi tājim*, *pukāre* and *davandī*, various kinds of stories, complex sentences, soliloquies and even an obituary! The selection is apt and if worked upon can be really useful. This brings us to the next point.

Often one gets a feeling that this book is not only meant to be read and imbibed: doing the exercises is of crucial importance. And if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then it will take at least one or two years to comment, because

Ranade cautions more than once that it will take time for these exercises to bear fruit, especially those regarding breath control, range, etc. Moreover, though this is a do-it-yourself manual, the author himself says (again more than once) that ideally one needs an instructor. However, the real danger lies elsewhere. Have you ever seen people reading the recipe of mutton biryani from a book titled 'Cooking Made Easy' and then making and eating an omelette sandwich?

Or, worse, young actors after reading this book would add a few words like tempo, tension, pitch, articulation, etc., to their vocabulary which already has words like bearing, mood, pace, and keep on doing exactly what they had been doing before. But of course, one cannot blame the author for that. The readers should be ready to be students. And they should also remember that as in modern drama schools all over the world, in India too voices have been trained (in the classical music tradition as well as the later *nāṭak-mandali* tradition) in the oral tradition, in some ways a *guru-shishya parampara*. This book does not try to replace this actual guru.

RAJEEV NAIK

Story of Kogga Kamath's Marionettes

Bhaskar Kamath

Regional Resources Centre for Folk
Performing Arts, Udupi, 1995

viii + 123 pages; Rs 250, US \$ 50

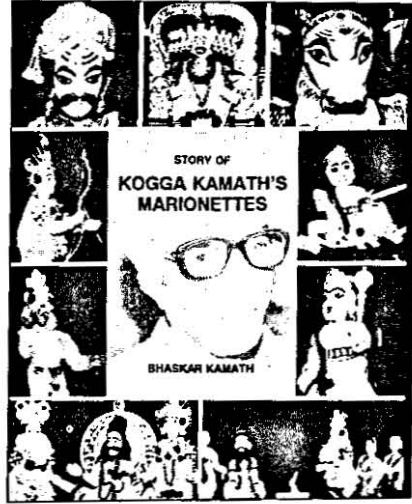
The Story of Kogga Kamath's Marionettes is one of the first much-needed detailed studies of a traditional puppet style of India. The Yakshagana Gombeyatta string puppets of Uppinakudru have for the first time in this book a written record of what was till now an oral history. This book is a model for books dealing with Indian puppet theatre in the future.

The twenty chapters cover in great detail the travails of the Kamath family who have kept this art alive for five generations. They cover the history of this form of puppetry, the innovations introduced, the making of the puppets, their presentation on stage, etc. Even a chapter on spectators is included: "... only with a responsible and responsive audience the puppet theatre reveals its fullest power of appeal".

The book is well illustrated with 24 colour pages—scenes from plays, puppeteers, and personalities connected with the Uppinakudru family. The line-drawings illustrating the iconography, primary features, details of costume, decoration, stage and props are clear—and, importantly, in proportion.

Bhaskar Kogga Kamath, the youngest in the family, who has compiled and written the text (in Kannada) and Dr N.T. Bhatt, who has translated it into English, have gone deep into the technique and details and made it a most readable and informative journey.

Few books speak about the people behind the scenes, and in the chapter on the artists associated with this group we get an idea about the collective atmosphere of the puppet troupe and the respect given to individual members, which is rare these days.



This book would be of great value to puppeteers all over the world as well as research scholars, and hopefully the publishers will think of printing other such valuable material on the puppets of India. Considering all the effort put in, the publishers could have been a little more attentive to the quality of the colour printing, which might have been improved in this otherwise brilliant book.

DADI D. PUDUMJEE