

BOOK REVIEWS

The Kṛṣṇagīti of Mānaveda (Kalāmūlāsāstra Series, No. 20)

(ed. and tr.) C.R. Swaminathan
and Sudha Gopalakrishnan

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The *Kṛṣṇageeti* of Manaveda, translated and edited by Dr C.R. Swaminathan and Dr Sudha Gopalakrishnan, is a valuable addition to scholarship on the 'traditional' performing arts of Kerala. Both translators have achieved some eminence in their fields: Dr Swaminathan has served as Adviser in Sanskrit to the Government of India, and Dr Gopalakrishnan has had substantial experience with Kerala performing arts. While this work is important, there are a few shortcomings that need consideration. Chief among them is the absence of a definitive introduction presenting information on the staging of the *Kṛṣṇageeti*, which we know of as Krishnattam.

The *Kṛṣṇageeti*, the source-text (in Sanskrit) of Krishnattam, the votive performance of Guruvayur celebrating the life of Krishna, was composed in 1654. The author, Manaveda (1585–1658), ascended the throne of the Zamorin of Calicut the following year. A devotee of Krishna, his favourite deity was Lord Guruvayurappan in the incarnation of Mahavishnu. The temple at Guruvayur, known as the Srikrishna temple, celebrates the deity in this particular *avatara*. Legend has it that Manaveda, with the assistance of a sage, had a vision of the child Krishna. Captivated by the lifelike presence of the child-god, Manaveda attempted to take it in his arms, only to discover that the child had vanished, leaving as a trace of his presence the customary insignia of a peacock feather. Manaveda had a crown

कृष्णगीतिः



FROM THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

made with this peacock feather on its top, which was donned by the actor playing the role of Krishna in performances of Krishnattam.

There has been some speculation re-garding the translation of the *Kṛṣṇageeti*, a lyric

poem, into Krishnattam, a performance that incorporates song, verse, and acting. This is indicated by the fact that while the *padas* (songs) intended for acting are simple and attractive, the connecting verses are heavy. The latter, however, bear testimony to Manaveda's Sanskrit scholarship. The predominant quality of the work is its evocation of *bhakti* towards Krishna, who is often addressed directly. Notwithstanding the fact that the *padas* and the verses seem to have distinct functions, the composition still conveys the impression that it was intended for stage presentation. The presence of a chronogram, "*Graahyam Sṛthir Gathkaiḥ*", accompanying the composition's Kali Yuga date indicates that Manaveda intended it to be sung. Given the combination of scholarly verses with lively *padas*, details of intricate stage techniques, and the predominance of dance, it has been suggested that the choreographic aspects of the *Kṛṣṇageeti* may have been incorporated by some other member of the Zamorin's family. Even if this was the case, it is likely that Manaveda's tacit consent was required for the text's choreographic presentation to Lord Krishna.

These juxtapositions of the choreographic elements with the lyric are probably responsible for the occasional 'lack of propriety' in the stage performances. In his Malayalam translation of the *Kṛṣṇageeti*, P.C.V. Raja (also a member of the Zamorin's family) remarks upon the presentation of pada

6 in the *Krishnageeti*'s first story, that there is little correspondence between what is acted on stage and what is presented in the text. In this instance, while the poem speaks of incidents that occurred on the day after Krishna's birth, the stage representation gives the impression that the child is over a month old. Yashoda, similarly, is seen dancing with *gopis* on the day after the child's birth. While such incongruities might also be found in other sections of the composition, the devotional thrust of the text makes them inconsequential. Questions of mimetic 'realism' are hardly an issue in a context of bhakti.

A more recent history of the practitioners of the form is also called for. Till 1955, the Krishnattam troupe was stationed at the palace in Calicut. From there they would travel yearly to the temple in Guruvayur where they performed the entire cycle of eight plays. En route to Guruvayur, the troupe would perform in temples and at the Zamorin's revenue-collection offices. Since 1955, however, the troupe has been based in Guruvayur; its maintenance is the responsibility of the temple authority (*devaswom*). The troupe's performance-schedule is decided by the *devaswom*. Devotees can, however, sponsor performances of particular plays on payment of a fee. It is believed that the deity would fulfill the wishes of the devotee upon receiving such votive offerings. The story of the incarnation is enacted for the birth of a child, Krishna's marriage on occasions when a suitable bride or groom is sought, etc. Another votive offering involves the problem-stricken devotee donning the costume and make-up of Srikrishna in order to worship the deity. These instances reveal the devotees' sentimental attachment to the art-form and its manifestation of the divine. The conviction that the actors embody the divine is clear from the way devotees prostrate themselves before the actor playing Krishna, and make offerings of cash presents after the performance.

A major lacuna of this publication is the

translators' failure to indicate the sources for the Sanskrit text they have reproduced. The other texts available in print include:

(i) *Krishna Natakam*, in Devanagari script, edited by Pandit P.S. Ananthanarayana Sastry, Mangalodayam Ltd, Trichur, 1914,

(ii) *Krishnattam (Krishnageethi)*, in Malayalam script and with Malayalam translation, translated and published by Professor P.C. Vasudevan Elayath in 1965, and later republished by the Guruvayur Devaswom.

(iii) *Krishnattam (Krishnageethi)*, in Malayalam script, with a translation in Malayalam by P.C.V. Raja; the first chapter alone was published in 1962.

Mention must be made of other works on Krishnattam. These include A.C.G. Raja's book in English which presents a condensed version of the stage production. In his *Theatre and the World*, Rustom Bharucha has devoted a chapter to Krishnattam, 'Waiting for Krishna' (Manohar, 1990). This article provides much critical insight on the form. A more recent publication, *Krishnattam* by Martha Ashton and Robert Sikora, is both a history of the form and a travelogue. The Krishnattam troupe in Guruvayur itself possesses a palm-leaf manuscript of the text in Malayalam. However, the definitive text of the *Krishnageeti* is the one by Professor Elayath, a Sanskrit scholar of great repute.

Though unacknowledged, it is likely that the book being reviewed is also based on Prof. Elayath's version of the *Krishnageeti*. This is indicated by similarities in details such as those concerning stage directions; directions for the use of the curtain; and also the ragas based upon which the padams were sung.

Krishnattam enacts the life of Krishna over the course of eight stories: *Avataram* (incarnation); *Kaliyamardanam* (the beating up of the snake Kaliya); *Rasakreeida* (the divine dance of Krishna and the gopis); *Kamsavadha* (the killing of Kamsa); *Swayamvaram* (the marriage of Krishna); *Bana Yudham* (the fight with Banasura); *Vividha Vadham* (the killing of

Vividha); and *Swargarohana* (ascent to heaven—Krishna's passing away.)

Certain conventions determine the order in which the stories are enacted. For instance, the eighth story which deals with Krishna's ascent to heaven is never presented on its own as that is considered inauspicious. It is mandatory that a performance of this episode be followed by a performance of the first play (*Avataram*). While the names of the plays refer to their main events, several other stories and incidents comprise their subtext. Malayalam editions of the plays provide viewers with synopses of the various events they are likely to witness.

Each play works with a precise number of padas and verses, and uses specific ragas. Every play contains $14+10+10+7+5+7+3+6=62$ padas. In addition, there are 93 musical verses (*padya geetham*) which are sung in *tala*. There are a total of 321 verses in each play; these include those at the beginning and in-between padas. These *shlokas* are rendered in ragas. An examination of the ragas and talas used in Krishnattam would be relevant to a study of the form.

Composed in 1654, *Krishnageeti* is the earliest composition in Kerala in which the composer prescribed both the raga and the tala. Venkatamakhin formulated the scheme of 72 *melakartas* in Carnatic music around the same period. Thus Krishnattam also predates the Trinity of Carnatic music. Such contextualization of *Krishnageeti* within the history of Indian classical music would highlight its significance to this tradition. *Krishnageeti* brought a whole range of ragas and talas into vogue over 350 years ago.

It is commonly believed that the mode of singing practised in Krishnattam adheres to the Sopana style. This style is not confined to Kerala alone but was practised in Tamil Nadu as well. Dr S. Swaminathan believes that Thevaram songs were (and probably continue to be) sung in the Sopanam style. In Kerala, the basics of this style are maintained in the *thodayam* of Kathakali. Formerly, *thodayam* was taught as the primary lesson for Kathakali,

but more recently there has been a changeover to *sarali* (*sa ri ga ma*), which is now the first lesson.

Information on Krishnattam's use of ragas and talas is available from palm-leaf manuscripts (such as the one in the possession of the Krishnattam troupe) and from three books published on the subject. These include P.S.A. Shastry's work of 1914, Prof. Elayath's work published in 1965, and P.C.V. Raja's 1986 publication. Most of the ragas in P.S.A. Shastry's book, with the exception of three or four songs, tally with those in the Krishnattam's troupe's manuscript. In the introduction to his book Prof. Elayath has clarified that his ascription of ragas to verses and padas was based upon the practice followed by the singers. An examination of Elayath's book reveals that only a few songs have ragas different from those mentioned in the manuscript. Prof. Elayath's research had led him to consult several manuscripts. He therefore had the opportunity to record differences or changes in the ragas between manuscripts. Unfortunately for musicologists, he did not realize the importance of noting down the differences.

Over the years, changes have occurred both in Krishnattam's raga and pada structures. The influence of other forms such as Kathakali is also in evidence. In 1978, in an attempt to 'improve' the rendering of music in Krishnattam, the temple authorities appointed some well-known Kathakali teachers to train Krishnattam musicians. Consequently, the ragas of more than thirty padas changed. The ragas in use now are those found in Shri P.C.V. Raja's book. An early work on the ragas used in Krishnattam is Dr V. Raghavan's 1943 article published in the Music Academy's journal, which discusses the ragas mentioned in P.S.A. Sastry's book.

There seems evident a process of selection at work in the choice of ragas used in Krishnattam. Prior to the interventions of the Kathakali musicians, transitions were already at work. Ragas such as Samanta Malahari,

Indisa, Panthayai (ri), Ghantharamalavi and Kedarapanthu, among others, had fallen into disuse. While some of these ragas have in fact been mentioned in the old Kathakali *attakathas*, the musicians remain unaware of them and use instead a limited number of ragas with which they are more familiar. This process of change and influence across forms is not limited to Krishnattam alone. Interestingly, younger Kathakali musicians have replaced ragas well-known in Kathakali with several North Indian ragas.

Neglect and thoughtlessness about the form's history and future development have also contributed to the disappearance of the old ragas. It is worth mentioning that this reviewer had once been associated with a committee appointed by the Guruvayur temple authority to edit an *attaprakaram* (manual for acting) for Krishnattam. As part of the exercise he submitted detailed charts listing ragas and documenting changes in their use. To his dismay, he discovered that many of the ragas seemed to have been changed thoughtlessly, almost as if to satisfy the idle whims of some Kathakali instructors. Unfortunately for Krishnattam, these changes are irreversible. Attempts to retrieve Krishnattam's musical heritage have been fraught with accidents. A few years ago the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi commissioned recordings of *padas* by older musicians. These have unfortunately been misplaced. This reviewer was however able to convince a friend, A.S. Panchapakesan, to notate some of the *padas* in the old ragas and publish them in the Guruvayur Devaswom's magazine *Bhaktapriya*.

Another significant change in the performance involves the singing of *shlokas*. Formerly, these were sung in raga Kedaragowla, which was therefore repeated several times during the performance. More recently, there has been a tendency to sing the *shlokas* in various ragas.

The *talas*, on the other hand, have not been tampered with. The dance also continues to be the same, except for some editing which has

reduced repetitions. Gestures and facial expressions have however become more elaborate, revealing the influence of the Kathakali artists. The task of editing the *attaprakaram* was duly completed by the committee, but its publication has been delayed. This is a pity since the text could have helped the development of a distinctive form for Krishnattam.

Among Krishnattam's characteristic features is the use of tableaux to present some sequences, such as the scene representing Vaikuntha, or Krishna and Satyabhama atop Garuda. These were no doubt meant to enhance the evocation of *bhakti*. Another feature is the use of colourful masks to depict characters like Brahma, Murasura, Putana, Jambavan, Vividha, etc.

The use of the half-curtain is a performative feature that Krishnattam shares with other performing arts of Kerala. As in Kathakali, the half-curtain is held by two stage hands. However, mention of the curtain is not consistent in the works of different scholars. In the original manuscripts and in P.S.A. Shastri's Devanagari text no mention is made of the curtain. In the Malayalam editions, however, instructions are given for holding and removing the curtain.

Dr Swaminathan and Sudha Gopalakrishnan's version also offers directions for the use of the curtain, though only as part of the English translation. The authors are indebted to Prof. Elayath's Malayalam version for the details they incorporate. The Sanskrit text in this volume makes no mention of the curtain, except on page 18, at the end of *pada* 4, where the word *thiraseelu* (Malayalam for curtain) is used in Nagari script. There is no corresponding translation of this detail in the English section. Consistent with the general indifference to academic conventions seen in the book, there is evidence here also of haphazard and indiscriminate borrowing.

Characteristically, the work shows little critical insight that would help the reader

distinguish between the use of the half-curtain in Krishnattam from the use of the curtain on the proscenium stage. Given its centrality to the action on stage, it is perhaps appropriate that expressions like 'curtain held' and 'curtain removed' be used as directions for the half-curtain. This text, however, employs stage directions such as "curtain falls", reminiscent of the proscenium theatre. Elsewhere, in a literal but inaccurate (and misleading) translation of the Malayalam '*thira marunnu*', the stage direction suggests that the "curtain is changed". This direction would be more appropriate for the Parsi theatre where several painted curtains served as location scenes to accompany shifts in the play's action. In a context where forms like Krishnattam are increasingly threatened by the possibility of erasure, it is important that texts which claim to represent and document a form make clear to its audience the qualities which make it unique.

The half-curtain is integral to the stage mechanisms employed by Krishnattam in its attempt to represent Krishna's divinity. It performs specific and subtle functions that are often imbued with metaphysical significance. A careful rendering of directions for its use is therefore critical to a Krishnattam script. The text being reviewed provides an instance of the distortions in meaning that can result from imprecise stage directions. At one point in the narrative, when the gods praise Krishna "while still in Devaki's womb", the direction should read '*thira thazunnu*'— 'curtain is lowered'; instead, this is rendered as "Curtain—praise of devas" (17). There is no mention of the lowering of the curtain. In performance, the stage hands hold the curtain at a level that hides the actor's legs while allowing the abdomen and face to be visible. As P.C.V. Raja has explained, there is a significance to instructions to this effect. Religious (iconographical and performance) traditions hold that the gods, even when they reveal themselves, do not touch the earth with their feet. The curtain, therefore, serves the purpose of hiding their feet and legs while at the same time making

them manifest figures.

In performance the curtain is removed or held depending upon the particular verse being sung. The text presented by Swaminathan and Gopalakrishnan often ignores these directions. There are also instances where directions are wrongly given as either "Curtain" or "Curtain rises" instead of as 'held' or 'removed'. While a translation of the *Krishnageeti* text does not necessarily call for the inclusion of stage instructions, their presence would have helped the reader visualize the lyric text in performance.

The absence of a sufficiently detailed introduction is felt yet again while looking for an explanation for the book's omission of important details. The thodayam sung before the performance has not been included. While this may not be a part of the *Krishnageeti*, it is regularly sung before the Krishnattam commences. The Malayalam editions incorporate the text, but it is not a part of P.S.A. Shastry's Nagari-script edition.

In another instance, some of the Sanskrit shlokas preceding the plays have not been translated into English. Particularly important in this regard is shloka 3, "With a body adorned..." This shloka is sung before the start of all the eight plays. Prof. Elayath's work testifies to its importance. He also indicates that the shloka was often recited in other contexts. These details are not mentioned in the text by Swaminathan and Gopalakrishnan. It also fails to provide the names of the ragas in which the verses are sung. The *mangala-shloka* which is recited at the end of each play is only mentioned in a few of the plays.

The editors' cavalier attitude to detail is once again evident in their treatment of the Mullapoo Chuttal, one of the most famous dance compositions in Krishnattam. This dance is performed on two occasions — as part of the incarnation story and during the *Rasakreedā*. The text shows it as part of the performance only in *Avataram*. A similar omission is the failure to mention another significant dance,

Kutti Ettuthu Attam ('dance holding the baby') early in the text. It is likely that this is because Prof. Elayath's text does not mention it.

The text's failure to provide readers with a critical understanding of the place of Krishnattam in Kerala's performance traditions is again underscored in its overlooking of the relationship between speech and dance in performance. Krishnattam could be said to occupy an intermediate position between Kudiattam and Kathakali in this regard. The actors in the former speak while using *mudra* and footwork. In Kathakali, performers do not speak, and in Krishnattam (which occupies a middle space) speech could be considered a remnant. It is important in this context to mention that Krishnattam actors no longer sing or speak, probably influenced by Kathakali training. The gopis who formerly spoke and sang now sit glumly in a row.

There are other smaller examples of carelessness which could have been avoided. On page xiv of the 'Introduction', the first words in the last four lines are not printed. The space is simply left blank. Other slips involve the art-form Ayyappan Thiyattu being referred to as Ayyappa; the Bhagvathi cult being called the Bhagavatha cult; and the Zamorin being offered Cochin as his kingdom instead of Calicut. Given the eminence of the two scholars concerned, such errors are dangerous as they can well be replicated in the future.

The book's editing leaves much to be desired. In the 170 printed pages of Sanskrit, there are about 60 spelling mistakes. Most of these are minor errors such as long vowels being replaced by short vowels, or an inversion of letters. On page 174 however, where the word "Krishna" (कृष्ण) appears eleven times, it is printed as 'Krishma' (कृष्म) thrice. Elsewhere, the raga Ghanthara (घन्तर) is spelt 'Ghandhara' (घन्धार), raga 'Kurunhi' is printed as 'Kurinji', and raga Kanakurunhi appears as 'Kanakurunji'.

At more than twenty places, Sanskrit equivalents of Malayalam words are not

offered; instead, the Malayalam words are transliterated in Nagari script. 'Purappat' (पुरप्पाट) and 'Bhoomideviyum Brahmavum' (भूमिदेवियुं ब्रह्मावुं) on page 4, 'Thiraseela' (तिरसेल) on page 18, 'Gopikumar' (गोपीकुमार), etc., are some examples of this. These words have been used in Prof. Elayath's Malayalam edition. They are not part of either the palm-leaf manuscripts or P.S.A. Shastri's version. The translators would have done better to use the Sanskrit equivalents. Strangely enough, this problem reoccurs in the English translation where English equivalents are also unavailable.

The English translation is fairly effective and conveys the ideas of the Sanskrit original. At places the English rendering excels the Malayalam translation. However, there are occasional slips which are misleading. It is likely that these problems are the result of an excessive dependence on the Malayalam translation. Consequently, "circulated" is used in place of 'circumambulated' (109); 'akaryam' is read as "highly avoidable" (59); 'outwitting' as "surpassing" (143); 'river bed' as "river bank" (177); and 'lotus ponds' as "lotuses" (199).

Another instance of the text's unacknowledged dependence on Prof. Elayath's translation is to be had in its unwitting reference to Krishna playing with a crane after killing Bakasura (69). The Sanskrit text makes no mention of this incident. It is clear that the translators have extrapolated the stage directions from the Malayalam edition onto the English translation. In performance, Krishna is represented as playing with the crane's beak. The misunderstanding could have arisen from the Malayalam word *kokku*, which refers to both the bird and its beak.

Problems vis-à-vis the consistency of the translation abound. Certain words from the Sanskrit text have not been translated into English, even though they are important. Two entire stanzas from page 208 have been left untranslated. On page 336, three stanzas found in the Malayalam and Nagari-script editions are not printed at all. Also to be found are

imprecise translations that distort the meaning of the text: on pages 283–4 ‘*agyanat*’ (अज्ञानम्) is translated as “unwillingly” instead of ‘unwittingly’; on page 42, “*dathyoooha*” (दात्यूह) is interpreted as “snail” (45), while it actually means ‘bird’. I hazard the guess that this mistake has arisen from a misreading of the word ‘*nattu*’ as ‘*natta*’ in Prof. Elayath’s Malayalam edition. *Nattu* is owl and *natta* snail.

The translation also reveals a general failure to transmit the emotional sensibility of the original. Words such as ‘*batha*’, ‘*hantha*’, ‘*Siva Siva*’, etc., contribute to this quality in the Sanskrit text. The translation is not on the whole sensitive to these nuances.

The book presents problems in terms of the arrangement of stanzas and their translations alongside. The group of *padas* following the first *charana* (feet or stanza) is numbered “I”. None of the *charanas* which follow are identified by number. Further, the English translations are not placed right opposite the *charana*, and in a few cases two *charanas* are translated together. There is therefore some difficulty in correlating the translations to individual *charanas*. The *charanas* and their translations should have been given corresponding numbers for easy identification. There is, however, no such confusion with regard to the *shlokas* and their translations, which have been carefully numbered.

An interesting exception to this norm can be found on page 185 (last line), which reads “*Shloka* 53 is repeated as a benedictory verse.” *Shloka* 53 is however not a part of this text. Cross-checking reveals that both the reference and the missing *shloka* are (not surprisingly) from Prof. Elayath’s Malayalam edition. Only extremely careless scholarship could permit the inclusion and citation of a reference number from another work.

Considering the numerous errors in the book, it would have been a good idea to append an errata. More than 40 spelling mistakes occur in the English section alone — these include missing and transposed letters. One would

expect these to be discovered and corrected before publication. The most damning of these flaws in the editing is the repeated misspelling/mistranslation of ‘*ajita*’ (‘invincible’) as “invisible”. Page 273 has *Rukmini* misspelt as “*Rukmi*”. While these errors might be easily recognizable as such, they do not speak for the skills of either the translators and editors, or the publishers.

The reader misses an index or glossary in a work of this nature. This should be added in the next edition. It would also help to have the name of the story printed on the top of each page. The text makes occasional references to the *Bhagavata Purana* which are left unexplained and unreferenced. References would assist the lay reader.

The book carries 21 colour photographs, most of which are unfortunately either too small or unclear. The exceptions are the four pictures depicting *Krishnattam* masks. Another drawback is the fact that the pictures have been relegated to the back of the book and not used judiciously alongside the text.

While there is little doubt that the book reviewed is a noteworthy addition to the scarce literature on *Krishnattam*, it must be mentioned that sound and careful scholarship, respect for sources, and meticulous proof-reading are critical to an academic enterprise.

L. S. RAJAGOPALAN

Semiotics of Yakshagana

Guru Rao Bapat

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Yakshagana is a traditional performing art of coastal Karnataka. It is popular in the Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, and Shimoga districts of Karnataka and in the Kasaragod district of Kerala. At present there

are thirty-two professional troupes and more than 700 amateur groups performing Yakshagana throughout the year. According to a survey conducted by me in 1996, there were more than five thousand performances in a year (Bilimale, 1997). There are more than twenty thousand artists actively involved in this theatre. More than five lakh people watch Yakshagana throughout the night in a year. There is approximately a 14-crore-rupee turnover every year in Yakshagana. As Ashton and Christie put it, "With inexpensive lightweight materials, and incorporating natural or simple man-made products, Yakshagana artists create convincing effects of marked dramatic intensity, the equal of the world's most advanced theatre arts" (1977: 71).

This great theatre is rapidly changing now. The professional troupes are now aiming at making money and thus organizing on a commercial basis. New themes have been introduced. Tulu, one of the Dravidian languages, is gaining more prevalence in Yakshagana than Kannada, the official language of Karnataka. New experiments are being made in different aspects of the art — music, dance, text, costumes, etc. But although there are more than five thousand performances in a year, you do not see a single review in the press.

The available studies on Yakshagana, both in Kannada and in English, are descriptive and historical in nature. They do not treat Yakshagana as a performance. As an exception, Dr Guru Rao Bapat in his latest book has deviated from such studies and aimed to "analyze the significatory process of Yakshagana and study it in relation to the structure and ideology of the society in which this form of performance exists and communicates" (p. 5). The two books available in English (Karanth, 1974; Ashton and Christie, 1997) also have some major problems such as neglecting the regional variations, dealing with the traditional format of open-air performances exclusively, etc. For example, Dr Karanth is not prepared to accept the southern



style of Yakshagana. Tenku Tittu, as one of the main regional variations of this theatre; rather, he deals only with the northern style called Badagu Tittu. In his book, he has published 41 photographs; all of them relate to the latter style.

Even Ashton and Christie are a bit biased against Tenku Tittu. They have published just three pictures of Tenku Tittu and forty-four of Badagu Tittu. They have thus neglected a popular form which is still very popular among the people. Dr Bapat's study has overcome these problems.

Dr Bapat's book centres around the basic question of how meaning is generated and communicated in Yakshagana. Semiotics is his theoretical framework—the study of systems of meaning and communicative processes. The signals of Yakshagana are both verbal and non-verbal. To analyze these he has looked into the structure of the performance. As we know, the structure of an art in a cultural context is conditioned by social, political, economic and other factors. To understand the social context, Bapat leans on performance theory, which has emerged as one of the major modern approaches to the study of performance in folkloristics (Bauman, 1997; Clause and Korom, 1988).

Bapat begins his study with a brief introduction to the theoretical approach used in his book. He then conducts an inquiry into the etymology and meaning of the term Yakshagana. A brief account is given about the land, life, and culture of the people where Yakshagana has flourished. He then focuses his attention on the performance; he has studied the performance text from the perspective of its structure and its convergence and divergence from the structure of the written text. His syntagmatic analysis unfolds the linear and temporal structure of Yakshagana performance and his paradigmatic analysis unfolds the

function and meaning of each unit. In his syntagmatic analysis, he analyzes the preliminaries before the performance (the musical interlude, the rituals performed in the *chauki*, the preliminaries performed on the stage—Balagopala, Strivesha, Oddolaga, etc.). He goes on to examine the *prasanga* or episode and its performance, the oral conventions, the performance text, the closing prayer, and the concluding prayer. Dr Bapat has made a fascinating study of the *Kichaka Vadha* episode to show the difference between the written text and the performance text.

The second section of the third chapter is concerned with paradigmatic analysis of Yakshagana. Here he makes an extensive study of Sabhalakshana, Oddolaga, the narratology of the episode (the influence of Harikatha, etc.), the structure of the organization (open-air performance, commercial performance, and the contract system), the condition of the artists, and the structure of the audience. The concept of spaces in Yakshagana is also discussed in detail. In the fourth chapter, Dr Bapat has analyzed the communicative methods of Yakshagana. In Yakshagana, a whole web of communication including dance, language, both written and improvised text, make-up, music, costume, etc., is utilized. Each one of these is a different sign system and makes use of different signification processes. In the performance, all these disparate messages converge into one. Bapat's analysis helps us understand how all these channels work together to create one unified message and a single aesthetic experience.

The symbolic significance of Yakshagana has been discussed and examined in the fifth chapter. Decoding of symbols indispensably involves the task of interpretation. Sometimes the act of interpretation may seem to impose a meaning on a form of art. According to Clifford Geertz, interpretation is not imposing a meaning on an art-form but rather "gaining access to it" (1973). Dr Bapat agrees with Geertz and tries to interpret Yakshagana in relation to the social semantics of the society

where Yakshagana has flourished. According to him, Yakshagana provided the landlord a sanction, as it were, for his position and power. The stories of Yakshagana were always about divine personages and so the sponsorship of the performance provided, symbolically, "a divine sanction for the landlord/rich person to continue his exercise of authority over the rest of the villagers. The rest of the audience, having witnessed the performance by the courtesy of the landlord, would unconsciously imbibe the message regarding the power and position of the patron" (p. 196). The author also investigates the official and unofficial ideologies of Yakshagana.

This methodology and approach to Yakshagana is rather simplistic. Many folk performances that take place similarly in the night are opposed to the very principles and ethos of daylight performances. Just as night is opposed to day, their values are opposed to each other. In fact, it is through this opposition that day and night performances preserve their exclusive characters. One notices this in the Bhuta workshop, which is also very popular in coastal Karnataka. Here, in the nighttime performance, the whole value system is reversed. A man belonging to an 'untouchable' caste becomes a deity and commands the rest of the villagers. This man, who is suppressed and exploited in the daytime—in real life—becomes a god for the moment and lords over the property-owners and upper castes. This is a temporary deliverance for the downtrodden. The landowning class and the Brahminical system may have accepted this temporary subjugation only because it is purely transitory and would not affect real life. Siddavesha, another nighttime performance of the same region, records the rejection of the Dassayya and the Brahmana. It is also the rejection of Vaishnavism and priestly hegemony and traditions. It is the festive voice of the common man at night protesting against the ruling class and its religious hegemony. However, this is not the case in Yakshagana, which is also performed at night. In this theatre, the value

system of the real world of the daytime is intact. This art-form leans heavily on royalty and the Brahmins who have advocated it too. In this sense, Yakshagana is different from other folk performing arts, and is also opposed to the generally accepted principles of nature. Bapat has not raised this fundamental issue, and so he has not been able to go deep into the social consequences of Yakshagana.

His interpretation of the masculine qualities of Yakshagana is also debatable. Dr Bapat writes: "The most overt sign of the assertion of masculinity is perhaps the waist ornament of the male heroic characters. It is clear that this is an exaggerated iconic sign of the male genital organ" (p. 206). If this argument is accepted, one might also consider the headgear, ornaments, weapons, etc., of the actors to be genital organs. Neither the artists nor the audiences think so. If a critic or researcher tries to impose a meaning on an art form which is not shared by the general public, the exegesis is really pointless. Such psychological approaches are now antiquated.

The sixth chapter deals extensively with recent developments in the field of Yakshagana. Bapat discusses various topics like the organizational structure of Yakshagana, the emergence of commercial tent troupes, the writing of new episodes, new interpretations of old episodes, the process of secularization, and so on. The analysis Bapat presents in this context regarding the status of Tulu Yakshagana is very valuable. He provides a detailed, in-depth analysis of the choice of subject, the use of language, the use of costumes, the differences found between various shows of the same episode, etc. Bapat boldly dwells upon the caste-related issues that are inherent in Tulu Yakshagana. According to him,

It was not a simple question of replacing one

language with another [Tulu in place of Kannada]. Tulu Yakshagana became the vehicle of expression of the assertion of linguistic, ethnic and religious (non-Brahminical) identity. The form of Yakshagana was retained, but the discourse of traditional Yakshagana was rejected. The new Tulu *prashangas*...were about the folk deities and heroes of Tulu culture. [p. 239]

Such analysis would promote a healthy discussion of Yakshagana. Bapat has distinguished himself by taking up modern experiments in Yakshagana for evaluation while most others tend to talk only of the older tradition of Yakshagana. He makes a distinct impression by his unique treatment of the subject.

In this sense, Bapat's work is a very valuable contribution to the literature on Yakshagana, and will surely encourage a reappraisal of the art. Unlike all other published works on the subject, it has given equal weightage to traditional and modern Yakshagana.

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PURUSHOTHAMA BILIMALE

REVIEW: MUSIC ALBUM

Music of Sripada Pinakapani **An album of 14 cassettes**

Compiled by G.N.S. Raghavan

Published by S. Kameswara Rao
40/806, Srinivasanagar
Kurnool—518 004

Rs 500 (full set), Rs 40 (single
cassettes)

There is a discernible reaction among a section of younger Carnatic musicians against the unduly fast, percussion-driven and *gamaka*-free singing which has been in vogue on the concert platform in recent decades. They will find in this album a model of an alternative they long for: a style of singing in which the *bhava* or emotion and the feel of a raga is paramount, and not pyrotechnics or *laya* manipulation.

Speed is not intrinsically unmusical, nor is a slow tempo in itself musical—it can drag. But an unhurried pace is essential for rendering music with attractive *gamakas* and *anuswaras*. “If you run”, Pinakapani asks, “can you dance?” He himself delivers, on a slow-tempo base, stunningly fast and beautiful phrases. This is what used to be done by Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Ayyar and other veterans of what is known as the Thanjavur *bani*. Konerirajapuram died in 1921, but Pinakapani (born 1913) had the good fortune of hearing R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar (a disciple of Veena Dhanam) demonstrate for him how ‘Ayyarval’ used to sing. To our good fortune, Pinakapani in turn demonstrates in the opening segment of this album, where he discusses the fundamentals of good music, the features of excellence unique to the titans who flourished in the second quarter of the twentieth century. These include, besides Konerirajapuram, Veena Dhanammal, violinist Govindaswami Pillai, flutist Swaminatha

Pillai, and the vocalists Ariyakudi Ramanuja Ayyangar, Musiri Subramania Ayyar, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Ayyar, Mudicondan Venkatarama Ayyar, and Mannargudi Rajagopala Pillai.

Pinakapani heard these master singers from the 1930s, when he was a medical student. While listening to them, in person or on radio, he would take down, in notation, passages that struck him as particularly excellent. It is fortunate that the notebooks in which he preserved these notated passages were available for Pinakapani to consult when he was interviewed, in 1993, on behalf of Sangeet Natak Akademi as part of its documentation of outstanding artists. It is also fortunate that Pinakapani’s voice, somewhat gruff at the start of the interview, soon became mellow. He was thus able, at the age of eighty, to render melodiously and with clarity many snatches of great music of the past. It is as if he brought the great dead back to life for a while.

There are many who talk glibly about the Thanjavur *bani* without knowing what it was like. There are also those who complain that there is too much *gamaka* and decorative detail in Pinakapani’s singing. They will be surprised to discover that the old masters revelled in precisely such musical embellishment.

‘Arabesque’ is a term used to denote virtuosity with aesthetic appeal: decoration with fanciful intertwining of leaves and scrollwork. The term was employed by N. Raghunathan, chief leader-writer of *The Hindu*, who used to write as ‘Vighneswara’ for Khasa Subba Rau’s weekly journal *Swatantra*; in the issue dated 2 April 1995, he wrote about the Nagaswaram wizard T.N. Rajaratnam Pillai:

The seductive blowing gives you the pure spirit of melody. It is an enveloping enchantment, sensuous, full of surprises like ‘caverns measureless to man’ but rising ever and anon to confront the sparkling midday sun with arabesques of an unbelievable beauty.

High praise, and well deserved by Rajaratnam when at his best in rendering the *alapana* of a raga.

The term arabesque has also been employed with reference to Pinakapani. S.V. Seshadri, writing as 'Aeolus' in *Shankar's Weekly* of 1 August 1971, commented on the difference in the exposition of Todi by Pinakapani and by another singer, both heard on radio the previous month:

Pinakapani is by temperament as different from him [the other singer] as a soliloquy is from a declamation. Pinakapani conceives of music as an involved introspection, and expresses it in a pattern of arabesques which weave and intertwine in an amazing number of loops and knots. Presented on the nagaswaram model, Pinakapani's Todi had a tremendous impact. His music winds around him like a nebula... The concert had another weighty item in the Saveri padam 'Lemaro'. Both the raga and the song seemed to be especially suited to the Pinakapani style of introspective arabesque weaving.

High praise, again, and equally well deserved.

To what he learnt from the masters of the Thanjavur bani, including the Nagaswaram vidwans, Pinakapani added two gifts bestowed on him by nature. One is a fecund musical imagination, disciplined by a governing good taste that rules out caprice and the theatrical gesturing and melodramatic turns of phrase to which many music performers on the concert stage and on radio and television are prone. The other god-given gift is a voice that is at once weighty, resonant and supple. This has enabled Pinakapani—subject of course to the toll gradually taken by time—to render fast phrases mellifluously on a slow-tempo base. The unhurried pace permits him to pay attention to every syllable, and to punctuate the rendering with pauses filled with *dhvani* or suggestion, so as to endow each line with beauty.

It is a difficult but exquisite style. Even as the classics of literature are not amenable to rapid reading, Pinakapani's music calls for fully attentive listening. Perhaps because of the

high density of his gamaka-laden music, Pinakapani has not been a widely popular singer. Another reason for Pinakapani's obscurity is that the music sabhas have ignored him by and large. This may be because of an unease felt by professionals of the music establishment at the prospect of being outshone by an 'amateur'—even if he has trained many professionals including Voleti Venkateswarulu, Nedunuri Krishnamurthi, and Nookala Chinna Satyanarayana.

The musical bureaucracy of All India Radio, headed for many years in Delhi by a professional musician, also disregarded Pinakapani. He was not invited to sing in the National Programme till 1972, a belated offer which he declined. In the result, access to the music of Pinakapani has been virtually confined, till this album, to listeners within the range of the southern stations of A.I.R. from which he has sung from time to time.

The difficulty of grasping and relishing a style of music which is out of the ordinary is compounded when Pinakapani is heard with the regulation accompaniment of violin and Mridangam. While percussion can add lustre to the rendering of *madhyama-kala* compositions, and passages of *swara-kalpana*, the violin as an accompanying instrument is of questionable value except for providing breathing space to the main performer. Whether as intended faithful echo or when going off at a tangent, the sound of the violin follows, and partly crases, the impression made on the listener by the singer's voice. The greater number of the eighty-five items rendered by Pinakapani, presented here, are of his unaccompanied music.

They include a dozen-and-a-half Kirtanas of Annamacharya, set to music by Pinakapani. These are his own musical creations, and attest his calibre as a composer. Suffused with raga-bhava, they convey (as his rendering of Padams and of Tyagaraja's shorter lyrics do) the *pakkuvam* or ripeness which England's bard had in mind when he affirmed: "The ripeness is all".

The publisher acknowledges the blemishes of the album. The unaccompanied music was recorded by G.N.S. Raghavan, a journalist and author, from 1970 onwards on numerous visits to Kurnool or at Hyderabad or Delhi. These music sessions were not intended for presentation to the public. Pinakapani sang for one who was attracted by and ardently sought melody and aesthetic quality, and was uninterested in the grammar and rules of music. Pinakapani would sometimes relax *laya* by not waiting for the completion of an *avartana* before proceeding to the next. This was a liberty consciously taken. The recordings were done at one or other home, on domestic tape-recorders, and not in a studio with professional equipment. The listener may therefore have to adjust the volume knob from time to time for securing the desired level of sound. The

editing, too, betrays the non-professional touch. But these imperfections will not deter an earnest music lover. Rags cannot hide beauty, even if finery may enhance it.

While the album will be welcomed by music lovers in general, it will be found specially valuable by teachers and students of music. Though the interactive process of teaching and learning face to face remains the best method, the advent of electronics has made it possible to learn good music by listening to tapes at home, at hours of the day or night convenient to the listener. The distance that electronics has overcome is both of space and time. Students of future generations can profit from this album as much as those of our time.

S. UMA DEVI