

BOOK REVIEWS

The Ramayana And The Malay Shadow-play, P. L. Amin Sweeney;
The National University Of Malaysia Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1972.
Price: \$ 15.00

Prof. Sweeney's book, *The Ramayana and Malay Shadow-Play* is his doctoral thesis presented to the School of Oriental and African Studies, London and as such it is the first systematic and comprehensive study of the *Ramayana* tradition in the shadow theatre of Malaysia. Prof. Sweeney in his study covers all the important areas of this artistic and cultural tradition of the Malay people. He studies the repertoire and the presentational techniques of the shadow plays and their cultural and social content. He analyses the art of *Dalang*, the chief puppeteer and his role in the tradition of the shadow theatre. Prof. Sweeney deals with the thematic variations and different versions of the episodes of the *Ramayana* and presents a study comparing these versions with the local literary versions. This study forms an important section of the work.

The *Ramayana* tradition in the countries of the South-East Asia has greatly influenced the arts and the life of the people. The *Ramayana* as ideal dramatic material has been widely performed for all these centuries in the shadow theatre and other forms of theatre. The charm of the *Ramayana* has been so great and overwhelming that it has not only been recited and performed but also sculpted and painted in a variety of styles.

Shadow theatre in almost all the countries of South-East Asia is the main and oldest theatrical form and a vehicle of their cultural traditions and social values. Prof. Sweeney's book will prove valuable not only to the scholars of the *Ramayana* tradition but also to the students of the shadow theatre. It will also interest the anthropologist, sociologist and the folklorist.

Prof. Sweeney's work on the *Ramayana* tradition in the Malay Shadow theatre is of particular interest to the students and scholars of the traditional theatre and culture in India since we have a long and rich *Ramayana* tradi-

tion in the shadow theatre along with this tradition in other performing and plastic arts. The work is of importance because of the recent interest in and study of the vast and ancient shadow theatre tradition in India. It is only in recent years that for the first time we have turned to our shadow theatre which has four regional styles namely of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Mysore and Kerala. The Sangeet Natak Akademi organised a festival of shadow theatre in 1972 and this festival presenting plays in all the four regional styles was the first festival in the entire history of the shadow theatre of nearly 3,000 years. The festival revealed the artistic richness and the vitality of the Indian shadow theatre which also, like the shadow theatre in the countries of South - East Asia, reflects and is a part of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* traditions in Indian arts.

It is hoped that this study of the Malaysian tradition and also the study of the Javanese shadow theatre by Prof. Brandon (reviewed in this issue) will encourage similar systematic studies of the Indian shadow theatre tradition. There is also need to take up studies of the entire Asian tradition of shadow theatre indicating common practices and features and historical links between different traditions.

On Thrones Of Gold (three Javanese Shadow Plays); Edited by James R. Brandon; Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1970; price: \$ 15.

This volume on the Javanese shadow theatre by Prof. Brandon presents three *wajang kulit* plays from the repertoire of the *Mahabharata* cycle plays. The plays have not been presented in bare dialogue; Prof. Brandon has given detailed notes describing the scene, the action and the movements of the puppets. The dramatic action is also illustrated by a large number of photographs inserted in the text itself. The descriptions are so vivid that a sensitive reader begins to visualise an actual performance. This is an ideal way of presenting traditional plays in translation in a foreign language. This anthology is also the first of its kind presenting plays from an ancient and highly developed theatrical tradition.

The value of this anthology has been further enhanced by the most lucid and illuminating introduction by Prof. Brandon. In this introduction, he traces the history and the development of the Javanese shadow theatre, its repertoire and discusses various elements, techniques and conventions of the performance of a shadow play. Additional useful material has been incorporated in the appendix including a bibliography and a comprehensive glossary of technical terms.

The three plays presented in the volume are the Re-incarnation of Rama; Irawan's Wedding and the Death of Karna. The Re-incarnation of Rama occurs early in the Amarta period. The Pandawas are young; Ardjuna is beginning to court Sumbadra, who will become his first wife; Baladewa is on good terms with the Pandawas, and has not as yet become their adversary; Anoman, from the earlier Rama cycle, is alive, though a very old and weary ape. The main plot tells how the gods offer the generation of the Pandawas, as divine gifts, reincarnation of the spirits of the gods Wisnu and Basuki, thus linking the Rama and Pandawa cycles. Wisnu's spirit passes to Kresna and to Ardjuna from its previous incarnation in Rama and Leksmana. Released by this act from their last mortal obligations, Rama and Leksmana take their leave of earth. The ogre king in the play is the spirit of the dead King Rawana, Rama's demon enemy of the Rama cycle; the subplot of the *lakon* concerns his abduction of Sumbadra, a reincarnation of Sita, Rama's wife. When Anoman finds that the spirit of Rama, his old master, has been reincarnated in Kresna, he offers him his loyalty. Not only does the *lakon* link the Rama and the Pandawa cycles, and in so doing demonstrate the continuity of kingship so important in Javanese cosmology, but the *lakon* would seem to mark the real beginning of the Pandawas' glorious days at Amarta.

Irawan's wedding takes place at the height of Pandawa splendour and power. Ardjuna has married countless times. Sumbadra, his first wife, has borne him a son, Abimanyu, who has grown up and is on his honeymoon as the *lakon* begins. Irawan is the son of another wife, Ulupi. Baladewa is firmly allied with the Kurawas; it is he who precipitates the conflict of the *lakon*, by demanding Titisari, already engaged to Irawan, as a bride for Durjudana's son Lesmana Mudrakumara. In the intrigue that follows, the Kuawas are outwitted, tricked, and humiliated. At the very time Lesmana is journeying to meet his expected bride, she is discovering the joys of love with Irawan in the garden. At the end of the play Baladewa challenges Bima to admit that the Pandawas have deceived him. Bima cheerfully agrees they have—because they are in the right.

The Death of Karna is one of the *lakon* portraying the great war which brings to an end the lives of the Pandawas and the Pandawa cycle. The time is fifteen to twenty years after Irawan's Wedding. Gone are the easy and glorious days when the Pandawas sported at Amarta. Amarta has been lost to the Kurawas in a game of dice, and for twelve years the Pandawas have lived in poverty in the forest. They have been befriended once more by King Matswapati of Wirata, and with the help of their adviser, Kresna, have tried to negotiate the return of at least some of their lands. But Durjudana has refused to listen. Remembering all the humiliation he and the Kurawas suffered at the hands of the Pandawas from the time they were children, he has refused to give them any land, "not even the dust that can cover the head of a pin." Reconciliation between the cousins is

impossible, and the Great War, which all know must end in almost total destruction, begins.

In his introduction Prof. Brandon briefly refers to the origins of the Indian shadow theatre and possible links between the Javanese and the Indian shadow theatre. Quoting the authority of Prof. Hazeu, Prof. Brandon observes that since the technical terms used in Javanese theatre to denote performance techniques and equipment are ancient Javanese terms and do not have an Indian origin, it is improbable that the Javanese shadow play had been brought from India.

This subject of India being the home of puppetry and the puppet theatre having migrated from India to the countries of South-east Asia has been under debate for more than half a century. The debate has not ended and nothing has been proved conclusively. Apart from the difficulty of reliable historical data for determining the course of migration of the puppet theatre, the discussion and the researches on the subject have been unfortunately often influenced by political considerations and motivations. The study of the migration of theatrical forms, presentational techniques and conventions from one culture to another or within the same culture is a fascinating subject of theatrical studies, but it is not an easy task specially when the research motives are coloured by considerations other than scholarship and a spirit of enquiry.

All the 19th century scholarship on Sanskrit drama and the classical theatrical tradition was dominated by the subject of the influence of the Greek theatre on Sanskrit drama. And while most of the Western scholars spent all their time in proving that the influence of the Greek drama on the Sanskrit drama was considerable, their Indian counterparts denied any influence whatsoever. That the two ancient and great theatrical traditions came in contact and that this perhaps resulted in mutual influences is surely a fact of greater significance. Apart from the original source of a theatrical tradition being alien, it would be perhaps a more fascinating subject of study for a scholar of theatre that theatrical forms, even if they have come from a foreign land, acquire a very distinctive indigenous character by creatively incorporating local theatrical traditions and idioms, and this is what seems to have happened in case of the Javanese shadow theatre.

Though some of the Dutch scholars feel that the Javanese shadow theatre is not derived from India and Hazeu put forth the argument of the technical terms being of local origin, there are many scholars from Pischel to Brumet who consider that the shadow theatre has migrated to South-east Asia from India. Coming to the question of terminology it is not correct to say that none of the terms are of Indian origin. On the contrary there are a number of terms which are of Sanskrit and Tamil origin. The term *Kotak*, large chest in which the puppet-set is kept, is from the Sanskrit word *Koshthak*. *Talu* is again a Sanskrit word, which is used in the Javanese theatre for the

introductory music. *Antawatjana* in its Sanskrit form is *Anta-Vachan* (prologue) used in Javanese theatre for indicating the puppets by the pitch of the voice. *Camma Rupa* for leather puppet is from the Sanskrit term *Cherma Rupa*, image made of leather. Even terms such as *Alus*, *Bedolan* and *Garagara* seem to be of Sanskrit origin.

Apart from the terminology having an Indian origin there are other practices, conventions and presentational techniques followed in Javanese shadow theatre which have great affinity and similarity with the Indian tradition of the shadow theatre. Elaborate preliminaries involving many ceremonials and ritualistic practices, the technique of manipulation, the role of music in performance, the clowns and their dramatic functions and finally, the occasions of the performances of a shadow play are some of the aspects of a performance having similarities in the two traditions. The convention of projecting the good characters on the right side of the curtain and the bad characters on the left side is a theatrical convention, which is the product of the typical Indian philosophical and religious attitude. This convention is also followed in Javanese shadow theatre.

Shadow theatre in Java and Bali is the most important art form and has been for all these centuries a vital element of the traditional culture of the Indonesian people. The *wajang kulit* represents the total artistic and cultural traditions of the people and reflects their beliefs, ways of life and values. It is also a total and a composite art form incorporating the elements of the arts of recitation, music, and various crafts. The art of vocalisation is highly cultivated in Javanese shadow theatre. The *dalang*, chief puppeteer speaks, recites and sings the entire text of the play with amazing variations in intonation and pitch.

Javanese shadow theatre has the most developed tradition in the entire tradition of shadow theatre in this region. During the course of centuries it has become highly stylized and refined not only in delineation of the figures, but also in music and presentational techniques. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* traditions which have dominated the life and arts of the people in the countries of South-east Asia is very strong in the shadow theatre. These two epics have been widely performed in a variety of art forms in all these countries, but the shadow theatre is perhaps the most ancient and developed art form using *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* themes.

This anthology of the Javanese shadow plays should be of special interest to students of the shadow theatre and the traditional theatre in India and should encourage similar translations of shadow plays from one language into another. As in the Javanese tradition, so also in the Indian tradition, the shadow theatre primarily deals with *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* themes. Prof. Brandon has done great service to the cause of the studies of the traditional theatre of Indonesia. This will, I am sure, widen the area of interest in the Javanese shadow theatrical tradition and will encourage further studies.

Prof. Brandon currently on the staff of the University of Hawai has already acquired a reputation as a scholar of the theatre of South-east Asia. It may interest readers of *Sangeet Natak* that Prof. Brandon was in India last year to study the Indian shadow theatre and forms of the traditional theatre. He was greatly impressed by the vitality and richness of the shadow theatre of Andhra Pradesh.

Suresh Awasthi

Indian Musical Traditions, by V.H. Deshpande (Popular Prakashan, 1973). p.p. xvii +116. Price Rs. 25.

This is more or less an English version of Vamanrao Deshpande's Marathi book, *Gharandaz Gayaki*, which created quite a sensation in the musical circles of Maharashtra, a few years ago.

The book is on the very interesting phenomenon of *gharanas*, but it is not an historical account. As a matter of fact, there is no reliable and comprehensive history of *gharanas* at all. Deshpande's work, however, deals with the aesthetic qualities of *gharanas* of Hindustani vocal music as they exist now.

I shall not attempt a chapterwise discussion here, but try to get at, what I think is the essence of the book.

First, I should point out the limitation which restricts the value of the book. It deals only with Hindustani music and that too, vocal music. Vamanrao's Marathi title therefore is more to the point than this English one. For, this work does not cover all traditions and not all systems of our music. A little probe into Karnatak music might have given a different colour to the ideas expressed herein.

The basic concept—to which we will return later—is certainly credible and interesting, but perhaps, the author might not have written this book the way he has written it if, say, he had also looked into the growth of Karnatak music and instrumental music.

What exactly are *gharanas*? Vamanrao prefers to avoid the words 'styles' and 'schools' and calls them 'houses'. I think he is very near the fact here. I would also suggest the term 'guild' as this is how *gharanas* have been born and have grown. Till very recently in India knowledge has mostly been passed on from father to son. Even when a disciple from outside the family-fold is initiated and achieves eminence, he will yet consider the eldest member of the family as the head (*khalifa*) of the *gharana*; the *Khalifa* may be younger and less knowledgeable than he, but must be

revered. It is this centering round a family, the creation of an artistes guild, which is a minor factor of the formation of a *gharana*. Another important factor which the author rightly emphasizes is that music training has been—and I hope it will not disappear—the *guru* to *sisya* transference. This creates a very close rapport in ethos, techniques and mannerisms between the two, thus forming a strong tie of habit and tradition. Another statement is that for the establishment of a *gharana*, there must be at least three generations in the lineage. This is open to question. Most of the *gharanas* do have such a tradition. But even an accepted one like the 'Jaipur' started with Alladiya Khan and seems to be ending with the next generation of Kesar Bai and others. There are indeed few in the third. As for the 'Indore' it has become very popular and accepted even with the propounder, Ameer Khan, and his disciples still with us. People are talking now of the 'Kumar' *gharana*: those who have taken to the style of Sivappa Komkali. There are others who imagine a Bhatkhande *gharana*.

It is for one such reason that the present reviewer suggested that *gharana* and *vanis* are better studied as dialects of music analogues rather than linguistic and speech dialects. The possible methods of differentiation and analysis has also been indicated.

Deshpande has suggested a very good approach to the 'formal' analysis of *gharanas* and I think he is the first to have made 'reasonable' statements of such a kind. He takes the major elements of Indian music as the basic differentia: the *svara* ('note' 'tone') and *laya* ('rhythms', 'tempo'). *Gharanas* are placed as points or areas on a straight or curved line connecting these two polarizing qualities. 'Kirana' for instance is at the tone-pole and 'Agra' at the rhythm-pole. (Incidentally, Vamanrao would have done well to have discussed more Wahid Khan in the context of 'Kirana'. It is obvious that this branch of 'Kirana', including Hirabai, is qualitatively very different from the Karim Khan branch). 'Gwalior' and 'Jaipur' are placed at appropriate places on this continuum. I may here draw the attention of the reader to Deshpande's earlier essays, *Random Thoughts on Carl Seashore, Banis and Gharanas*, wherein he relates the *vanis* and *gharanas* to the tonal, dynamic, temporal and the qualitative aspects of sound.

Closely related though not similar to this time of logic is Ashok Ranade's incisive analysis of *gharanas* in terms of 'intensification' and 'extensification' (if I may coin such a word), in his Marathi work, *Snageetache Soundarya Sastra*.

The main drawback of Deshpande's book is its highly subjective evaluation of the various *gharanas*. As objective adherence to his postulates would have made this work more discussable.

Prof. B.R. Deodhar contributes a very good foreward. The translation is excellent, though I am not entirely happy with the glossary.

All in all, a pioneering study and I recommend it to those interested in breaking away from the rigidity of orthodox musicology.

B.C. Deva

Shakespeare-er Samaj-chetana, a study in Bengali of Shakespeare's social consciousness, by Uptal Dutt. M.C.Sarkar & Sons Private Limited, Calcutta, 1972; pages 12 × 532, Rs. 18/-.

Uptal Dutt's thesis is made abundantly clear from the very beginning. He tries hard to prove that Shakespeare was, in fact, a much greater Marxist than what some of the eminent Marxist interpreters of his work have themselves found him to be. He quotes, disapprovingly, A. A. Smirnov, Soviet Union's foremost Shakespeare specialist, who describes Shakespeare as no more than a glorious propagator of bourgeois humanism and a farsighted and incredibly skilful annotator of its policy and programme. What, on the contrary, Mr. Dutt is evidently in absolute sympathy with and which he reproduces even before the preface of his book, making it obviously the cardinal point of his contention, is this sentence from *The Lion and the Fox* by Wyndham Lewis: "Far from being a feudal poet, the Shakespeare that *Troilus and Cressida*, *The Tempest*, or even *Coriolanus* shows us is much more a bolshevik (using this little world popularly) than a figure of conservative romance."

While Mr. Dutt's voluminous—surely, a bit too voluminous—book has undoubtedly some merit, it suffers, to my mind, from this over-simplification, considering particularly how complex a personality Shakespeare was. Through appropriate illustrations from Shakespeare's writings, Mr. Dutt tries to analyse the former's reactions to some of the basic foundations of the bourgeois ideal prevalent in those days, which were: first, the importance of the merchant class, sea-voyage and overseas expeditions; secondly, the praise of gold and greed, profit and private property; and thirdly, the glory of individual freedom, monarchy and Protestantism. In all these matters Shakespeare's mind rebelled against the forces of the time in a way that, Mr. Dutt contends, would have totally satisfied today's Marxian protagonists.

A comparatively more convincing chapter of the book is the very first one, relating to the rise of the merchant class and Mr. Dutt's idea of Shakespeare's quite possible position vis-a-vis, specially as revealed through some of the utterances in *Tempest*, *Merchant of Venice* and *Troilus and Cressida*. Those were the days of the beginning of the Royal Navy and while the vision of a British empire was still lurking in the not too distant horizon, it was already a conceived possibility, an invitation to desired action. Indeed, as Gerard

Colson reports in his introduction to the French edition of Jan Kott's most remarkable *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, in the epoch of whom the priest of Stratford-on-Avon baptised on 26th April 1564 as 'Guglielmus, fillius Johannis Shakespeare' the best-selling book was entitled *The Principal Navigations Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*.

In the Middle Ages wealth was identified with a bag of gold coins. For several centuries the same wealth meant possessing fields, forests, cattle, a castle here or some vilages there. Then, somewhere, it became a ship transporting pepper or cloves or cotton, elsewhere granaries of rice and wheat or cellars of wine. Still later, following the onward journey of a transformation which Marx so lucidly explains, wealth, devoid of any physical substance or identity, became a sign, a symbol, an abstraction—a mere piece of paper. Man's power, inseparably linked with money, has followed, through the ages, a similar process of transformation. To prove his point, therefore, Mr. Dutt very aptly quotes Troilus, in *Troilus and Cressida* (II/2): "We turn not back the silks upon the merchant/When we have soil'd them . . . /Why, she's a pearl/Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships/And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants" Here is another apt quotation, though in a somewhat different vein but symbolizing the same impending end of rule by kings, from *Richard II* (III/2): "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,/And tell sad stories of the death of kings: How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,/Some haunted by the ghosts they have depos'd,/Some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd,/All murder'd!"

In some ways, Mr. Dutt's book is an important contribution to the already very bulky literature available on Shakespeare. That it is written in Bengali, in which serious criticism is increasingly scarce, is all the more gratifying. But I am afraid the following observations will also have to be made. Mr. Dutt does not seem to have a very academic mind, though the exercise he indulges in is of an academic nature. The result is that this profusely annotated book is occasionally full of disjointed and irrelevant arguments which, apart from fruitlessly increasing the book's volume, do not seem to serve much useful purpose. For example, there is a whole chapter on Jesus in which almost everyone from Plato to Pascal is discussed; only poor Shakespeare, who happens to be the subject of the entire thing, has conspicuously been left out. Mr. Dutt has also a pedantic tone and is frequently much too loquacious. As for the plates showing several performances of Shakespeare's plays included in the book the quality of their reproduction is not very good; nor is it quite clear how they add to or illustrate the points Mr. Dutt tries to make.

A more serious objection, however, is that if the language of a book on Shakespeare, even on his social consciousness, is so completely devoid of charm, finesse and poetry as the present attempt is, it cannot but be a pity.

Lokenath Bhattacharya