

BOOK REVIEW

Indian Music by B. Chaitanya Deva (Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi. 1974. Rs. 30/-).

A handy book on the origin and development of Indian music, its tones and rhythms being made somewhat meaningful to the layman, is what Dr. B.C. Deva of the Sangeet Natak Akademi has produced, drawing from his erudition and researches.

For the vast treasure-house that Indian Music is, the extant literature is meagre. *Indian Music* is, therefore, a valuable and much-needed addition and its merit lies in being both simple and comprehensive. While the intricacies may be left to the practitioners of the art, the true dimensions of Indian music ought to be appreciated better by lovers of music. In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of interest in our music in other lands, notably in Europe and U.S.A. It is to them primarily this book is intended and must rank very high among the publications of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

But the fascinating account of the growth of the ancient musical systems of India, the grammar and forms and cultural interactions that Dr. Deva has provided will be as revealing to the learned in this country with only a vague sense of appreciation for our classical music as those abroad developing an interest in the musical systems of the East.

A methodical presentation of the subject covering *Raga*, *Swara*, *Tala* and Forms as they have evolved through the centuries, shaped and influenced by saint composers and great musicians, helps the reader to get a fair insight into the highly technical aspects of Indian Music.

To enhance its utility, the book has an illustrated chapter on the rich variety of musical instruments as well as a glossary at the end. The value of the book in presenting an integrated view of Indian musical systems with all their complexities for the purpose of promoting wider appreciation of our great heritage cannot be

gainsaid. In some of the countries where Indian Music has evoked interest, there is lack of proper material for guidance of scholars and learners of our ancient art. A knowledge of Indian music abroad will also greatly help Indian musicians who go out to make a better impact and win more laurels.

The book is more than a "primer" on Indian Music, as Dr. Deva modestly describes it, because he has taken up the intricacies which abound our classical music for detailed treatment and he has treated them in an intelligible manner. *Raga* is the soul and substance of Indian Music and gets the pride of place in Dr. Deva's account, though *Raga* cannot be simply termed "the melodic seed". *Raga* is melody itself, and how it blossoms out naturally depends on the creativity of the artiste. The great hall-mark of Indian music is *raga*, a unique concept truly Indian, and the author, along with other interesting information, points out that the standard idea of *raga* had taken shape as early as the fifth century A.D. It is a pity that many musicians today tend to restrain themselves in their unfolding of this melodic concept, not exploiting in good measure the vast potentialities inherent in rendition of *ragas*.

The micro-tonal pitch differences (*srutis*) and rhythmic subtleties (*laya*) which have made our music somewhat complicated to outsiders have been explained at some length by the author who has throughout brought out the similarities as well as differences between the Northern (Hindustani) and the Southern (Karnatak) systems. The structural forms like the '*khyal*', '*dhrupad*', '*thumri*', '*kriti*', '*javali*' and '*tillana*' and the development of various '*gharanas*' with their particular characteristics have also been dealt with in a historical perspective.

The chapter on instruments, from the most primitive to the modern, well illustrated, rounds up the story of Indian music written in a succinct form. Maybe due to oversight, the author overlooked '*Tavil*', the inevitable percussion accompaniment to '*Nagawaram*', the wind instrument. He is also rather unduly harsh on harmonium which has many protagonists, especially among Hindustani musicians. It can have a supplementary role without taking the place of violin or the *sarangi*.

The lives and works of great musicians, composers and musicologists have been appropriately dovetailed in the scheme of the book.

With the focus on how to project the Indian musical systems and development in non-technical language, the author cannot be blamed for not going into greater detail on the impact of mass communications and technological devices on Indian music or on styles

of presentation. He rightly cautions "against the loss of individuality or encouragement being given to mediocrity.

"An adventurous spirit of enquiry and experiment in music is in the air", Dr. Deva observes. But one may not share his hope that, with "shorter programming and quicker movement" now establishing itself, "active creative music" is ensured for the future.

—S. Sethuraman.

Registered with the Registrar of News-
papers in India under No. R. N. 12760/65