

BOOK REVIEWS

Traditions of Indian Folk Dance: D. Kapila Vatsyayan, Indian Book Co. New Delhi.

Kapila Vatsayan is an established authority on Indian dance. Her book on "Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts" is a standard work. The present publication "Traditions of Indian Folk Dance", carries on further into newer and richer fields the theme she began. There are to-day books galore on Indian dance by Indians and foreigners alike. But, Kapila Vatsayan has a unique approach and treatment of the subject, which marks her as in a class by herself. Many have praised her for her scholastic achievements, her extensive and deep knowledge of the subject. In this context she may have rivals, though it is not easy to recall them, but in one and very important respect she stands by herself. This is her fine, clear and vivid presentation of this cultural facet, dance, in complete integration with all the others, starting from the physical background and the geological terrain to the many splendoured strands and elements that make up a human personality and the community in which it is evolved. After all, dance is the reaching out of our captive being to capture the universe and obtain liberation. The earliest primitive faiths, through their tortuous struggles to find harmony with the world around, contrived through man's amazing genius to build up a fabulous world of myths, make-believes may be, nevertheless very real to them. They consist of the many faces of nature, its changing moods, its benevolence and malevolence, of the spirits which dwell in every object, the mysteries of birth and death, important landmarks in life, like marriage.

All this naturally had to find expression as an experience, and there is no better medium for this than dance. It is almost the first thing a child does when it wishes to express itself, so natural, spontaneous, almost inevitable. These dances are not conceptual in our intellectual sense, but in a real sense, for they relate man to all these universal forces and factors. There are imitations of birds, from their hop to their flight, of other wider range of creatures, from the tiny cricket to the mighty bison. There are dances to mark every occasion, from the sprouting of the grain to the reaping of the harvest; from the birth of a child to the death of the old. There are bound to be local variations, depending on the immediate traditions that mould, shape and perfect the flowing delineations set into choreographic forms. But a single cord seems to run throughout the grand medley of dances of this vast country, North to South, East to West, binding them into an integrated cohesion. Several of the

legends and characters that prevail in the remote North-east region, also prevail and have relevance down in the southern-most tip. Painstakingly, the author has shown the links in a stupendous chain that stretches from end to end from the mountains to the sea. When we labour the point of national integration as though it has to be wrought by a herculean effort, we overlook the existing obvious links, so basic in the very core of our national life. This, the author has highlighted, and it runs through the pages, crammed with countless details, and one feels deeply indebted to her for reminding us of this important truth.

In all her writings, she also reminds us that all art expressions in India, from time immemorial have been clearly interwoven to form a single but rich mosaic, no matter what the medium of expression. This experience we should never lose, for otherwise the picture of our culture gets distorted, nay broken. This book is therefore much more than a mere compilation and description of dances.

We should not overlook another singular quality, the exhaustive picturisation of the terrain on which these dances grew. It may seem superfluous, but is most significant. Physical features and the environment vitally shape the characteristics of the inhabitants and therefore of their dance expressions says the author: "Nature has shaped the nature of "motion" in a subtle and effective manner".

A very pleasant feature of the book is the numerous sketches to illustrate the dances she describes — they show all the nuances of a dance, the varied movements of each body, the groupings and the different formations they make and the final total pattern they reach. One can but guess the tremendous labour that has gone into these meticulously drawn patterns. In fact they are so picturesque and beautiful that one hopes a special album of these sketches be made for study and guide lines to Choreographers — The vast sweep of the movements and the limitlessness of the space which they create would class them easily among worthwhile as works of art.

No narrative on India's cultural faces can be exhaustive. But, the book is a stupendous study, and has an incredible sweep from geology to Vedanta philosophy. The infinite care and authenticity with which each little detail of the myriad dances has been worked out, is breath-taking. I would say it is not a book for mere reading, but for *study*, to be assimilated in small doses, like an unfolding panoramic view.

Kamaladevi

Bharatiya Vadye. Dr. B.C. Deva; Marathi translation M.K. Paradhi; Sahitya Samskriti Mandal, Bombay, 1976. pp. 1-16+1-236.

The book *Bharatiya Vadye*, published by the Sahitya Samskriti Mandal, Maharashtra State, is a Marathi translation of Dr. B.C. Deva's book *Musical Instruments of India*. Dr. Deva is quite expert in the Science and Art of music and hence this book has been unique in the field of works on musical instruments in India.

The book is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter the author has discussed the cultural background. The culture of a people finds its expression through the different fine arts. The author is perfectly right when he says that Indian Culture is the synthesis of two main cultures i.e. Aryan and Dravidian. He has also taken into account the spread of Indian Culture outside India. In the second chapter, while outlining the evolution of Indian music, he has pointed out that Indian music is basically melodic and it took a long time to develop into the *raga*-system. The part played by folk and tribal music in this development is made clear with significant illustrations and citations like those of Matanga. From this view-point he has given the account of the music of South India from ancient times. As in other fields, in the field of music also, there was the exchange of ideas among North and South, throughout. There was the influence of the Middle East from 11th century onwards. The *Indraprastha Mata* came into existence which classified Indian *ragas* on the pattern of *mukams* of the Iraniyan music, fashioned new *ragas* with Indian names, having a mixture of Indian and foreign compositions and created new compositions for the old Indian *ragas*. This led to the disappearance of the old *murchana* system and establishment of the present 12-note scale.

This development had its effect on the musical instruments. The bow-shaped *vina* or the *svaramandala*-type *vina* disappeared and their place was taken by *vinas* having bamboo or wooden-staff (*danda*) as the finger-board or the fret-board. In the place of *grama*, the *mela* or *that* came into practice and new musical instruments like *shehnai*, *sarangi*, *sitar* and *tabla* etc. came into use. The effect of Iranian music on the music of South India was of course not much. After the 13th century A.D. Indian music branched off into the two distinct styles i.e. Hindustani and Karnatak.

The author has also dealt with the influence of Western music on Indian music and the influence of Indian music on greater India at the end of this chapter. He has pointed out that Western music which is mainly based on harmony, has its sway on music, wherein some composers have used it in orchestration. In the third chapter, he gives the various principles of the classification of the musical instruments and accepts the traditional classification of the *ghana* (i.e. solid-like cymbals), *avanaddha* (covered with hide, like drums), *sushira* (wind instruments, literally those having holes, like flute)

and *tata* (stringed). Then the author has described these four types in detail in four chapters. The rhythmic expression finds its outburst first among people; hence the *ghana* instruments are treated first, in the fourth chapter. With the gradual development of rhythmic patterns, the percussion instruments like drums come into use. The fifth chapter treats of them. The establishment of musical notes brings with them the wind and the stringed instruments. These are dealt with in the sixth and seventh chapters respectively. In the eighth chapter the musical instruments are classified according to the principle of musical acoustics. After this photographs of various Indian musical instruments found in sculpture and in actual practice, used in the folk, tribal and classical music of India are given. At the end there is the Index.

Dr. B.C. Deva has done a marvellous job in writing this book. As books on Indian musical instruments with a scientific and scholarly approach are practically non-existent this excellent book is a very welcome addition to the musical literature of India. In giving the details of the four types of musical instruments, the author has shown his exhaustive knowledge of the folk, tribal and classical music of North and South India. Along with textual references, he has used the sculptural representations, while pointing out the historical development of the different musical instruments. The various musical instruments that are in vogue at present are taken into account to complete the picture of their development. His deep scholarship becomes evident in his historical treatment. The classification according to musical acoustics given in the last chapter is on the basis of sound production. This classification also gives four types namely stringed, wind, finger-board and those having the use of skin and solid ones like cymbals. All the treatment in this chapter is thoroughly scientific. The photographs have made this book very interesting. The index is useful.

As regards the author's view of the influence of Persian music on North Danielou says in his book, *Northern Indian Music*, (page 34) that the opinion that the Northern music has evolved under outside influence does not agree with the facts except on very minor points. He states that North Indian Classical music still conforms today with the definitions of the ancient works. Arab and the Persian systems originally mostly derived from Indian music have become so reduced and impoverished in comparison with Indian music, that the idea of their having had any influence on its development need not be taken seriously. One can attribute the difference in the Hindustani and the Karnatak types to the development of different styles.

There are a few statements in this Marathi version which need improvement.

P. 18 — *Gatravino* is the same as *hastavina*. The *Saman*-singers indicate the musical notes by the tip of the thumb of the right hand touching its fingers, while chanting the *samans*. This is known as *gatravina*.

P. 10 and 85 — The statement that at the time of sacrifice the wives of Udgata used to sing with the accompaniment of *vina* is not correct. The wives of the sacrificers (i.e. *yajanan*) used to sing to the accompaniment of *vina*.

P. 88 — The name of the *Jataka* should be Guttala and not Gupitila.

P. 81 — The *vina* in Pattadcal sculpture does not appear to be a fretted one. The manner of playing indicates that the instrument was without frets. In one sculpture of Harshatmata temple at Abaneri (8th to 10th century A.D.), a musical instrument with 7 or 8 frets is seen. Of-course one can agree with the author and say that it is possible to understand that the fretted *vina* came into use in the musical practice of India during 8th century A.D.

This book is particularly important to music-lovers as it surveys the musical instruments in the whole field of folk, tribal and classical music. No author on Indian music has attempted to consider musical instruments in this manner. Our ancient and medieval authors on music have simply described the various musical instruments under the four traditional types without making such distinction of instruments used in folk and tribal music on the one hand and classical music on the other.

Sahitya Samskriti Mandal has done real service to the cause of Indian music by publishing it.

G.H. Tarlekar

Traditional Folk Media in India: Dr. Shyam Parmar, New Delhi, 1975, Rs. 45.

It is stating the obvious that Dr. Parmar's book is the first work on this subject of vital importance. But no reviewer can avoid making this obvious statement. I have chosen to do so both to emphasize the importance of this book, and to expose the apathetic attitude of the planners and administrators of the communication media towards this subject. Having made one obvious statement, I would risk making another — the folk forms have always served as an effective channel of communication, and played a vital role both in preserving the social structure, and helping the process of social change. This, the folk forms have done through the institution of clowns and the theatrical practice of improvisation. Even in forms dealing with religion and mythological themes, social and contemporary material is incorporated and comments made on topical events through these devices.

Dr. Parmar discusses the communication potential of the folk media,

and then describes various types: story-telling, ballads, musical forms, puppets and folk plays. He also very rightly emphasises their socio-cultural context, and the need to keep this contextual framework in view for utilising folk media for an effective developmental communication.

He also gives some examples of the use of folk media especially by Governmental agencies, such as the Community Development Projects, National Extension Service, Directorate of Field Publicity and that huge publicity organisation, Song & Drama Division. Though Dr. Parmar gives impressive statistical figures relating to the Song and Drama Division, its various regional units and troupes and the number of articles they employ, he does not evaluate their methods and achievements from the point of view of a communicator. It is a pity that no surveys and evaluation studies of our publicity work have been done. They have failed in many ways in selecting suitable forms, putting the message in context, important of their socio-cultural context, and their proper role both as independent media and as an extension arm of the mass media. Most of these are not of much value.

The book contains many excerpts and quotations from articles, seminar papers, reports and speeches, and these have not been fully absorbed and integrated with the discussion of the subject. The result is that the book gives the impression of a hurriedly compiled information booklet. I wish Dr. Parmar had not this limited objective, and had given us a comprehensive collection of papers, reports and documents on the subject. Such a reference work would have encouraged systematic, and in-depth studies in this area.

It is no wonder that the postscript of the book, giving a resume of the Inter-Regional Seminar-cum-Workshop on the Integrated Use of Folk and Mass Media in Family Planning Communication, is the most useful part of the book.

Having referred to the information material contained in the book I would like to point out certain gaps. The very first national seminar on this very theme organised by the Institute of Mass Communication in 1968, has not been mentioned. The seminar, convened at the instance of and in collaboration with the Sangeet Natak Akademi was the first of its kind; and brought together the publicity men and communicators, and folk artistes and scholars of folk forms, on one platform providing a rare opportunity for a dialogue. This was a very essential and useful exercise. It is a pity that it was not done earlier by any of the government agencies engaged in communication work, and it is a greater pity that the Institute did not take up any follow-up programme. There is a need to organise a series of such round-tables on a regional and zonal level for an encounter between these two groups. It is only then that we can evolve a rational approach to and suitable programme of integrated use of folk and mass-media, a concept so rightly emphasised by the UNESCO Seminar.

Another important event not mentioned by Dr. Parmar is the first folk theatre festival organised by the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1960 in Delhi. In this Festival *Jatra*, *Nautanki* and *Maach*, three folk forms were presented. A special feature of this Festival was that the traditional values were restored to the production, and along with one traditional play, a new play was also presented by the folk artistes. The flexibility of the forms enabled them to contain the new content. This reviewer in his capacity as the Hony. General Secretary of Bharatiya Natya Sangh and Inder Razdan and Mohan Upreti, the two most sensitive scholars of folk theatre, were involved in this Festival.

I wish Dr. Parmar had given some photographs illustrating the use of these forms in developmental communication. The photographs given are of traditional forms, which also have not been selected with a definite scheme or to illustrate some point. Almost all the photographs are from the vast photographic collection of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, but strangely enough Dr. Parmar has forgotten to give the credit. There are a few unfortunate factual errors. The most serious is a reference to Bohurupee's (wrongly spelt as Bahurupee) *Putul Khela*, an adaptation of Ibsen's *Dolls' House*, as a Folk puppet play!

Suresh Awasthi

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