

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**The Music and Musical Instruments of Southern India and the Deccan,** by C.R. Day. First published in 1891 by Novello & Ewer, London. Reprint by B.R. Publ. Corpn., Delhi, 1974. pp. 181. Price Rs. 96

This book, one of the modern 'classics', is by Capt. C.R. Day who was in the Oxfordshire Light Infantry of the British Army. During the tenure of his service in India, he took the opportunity to study Indian music, particularly of the south. As the Captain says in his Preface to the first edition, "The work which is now published has been the result of much study and research during a term of foreign service while the author's regiment was in India." The work has been out of the market for years and it is good to see it again.

While studying this book it is necessary constantly to bear in mind that the writer was a foreigner without much acquaintance with the inner feelings of our culture and also that at the time it was written not much objective research had been made on the then current music. In spite of these limitations, Day produced one of the best books in the field; his acumen and objectivity are very noteworthy indeed. And many of our present day musicologists should certainly take many a leaf out of his book!

The main confusion in the work has been caused by the intermingling of the two systems—Hindustani and Karnatak. This was perhaps unavoidable because the area where Day worked included parts of Maharashtra and Hyderabad. Hindustani music was (and is) practised in both provinces, but the author has gathered much of his theoretical material from Karnatak sources, for many of the music terms he uses seem to have been collected from Telugu musicians, besides standard Sanskrit texts from second hand sources. All this has resulted in many entanglements of concepts from the two systems.

There are some incongruous equations as, for instance, '*sloke*' and '*ghuzuls*' (p. 2). On p. 11 he says that "Hindu theory . . . is naturally very simple . . . compared to that of Europe"; Westerners now know better! *Sangita Ratnakara* is dated wrongly as 200 A.D. (p. 13). Again, on p. 14 there is the questionable statement that the *Sangita Parijata* "contains the key to the present Karnatik system". (Italics mine). The entire foundation of the discussions on *sruti* and scale is wrong. The mix up between the two systems mentioned earlier is exemplified when Day uses the word *that* in connection

with Karnatak music (p. 22). Again, obviously a *tala* with the order 4244 cannot be the same as 2444 (p. 37).

It is of course very easy to pick out innumerable other mistakes and mis-statements. But then it would only belittle the value of this excellent work.

What is more necessary is to grasp the finer qualities of Day's book. First, is the objectivity: he very correctly points out, "Most of the vernacular works upon music have been written by Pandits who have endeavoured to adapt the principles contained in the ancient works to their own ideas. Many of these books consist but of a string of quotations—often contradictory—taken at random from Sanskrit works of all dates, and interlaced with comments rather worse than useless, unless it be to mystify the reader.... Other works in the vernaculars have been written by practical musicians who really do possess the knowledge they try to impart, but will not do so without mixing it with the absurdities of these so-called Pandits". (p. 6). These comments apply to much of the run of the mill musicology today and, alas, even now contemporaneity is of no great significance to our musicologists in general. Secondly the book covers not only classical music but also non-classical music like the *lavani*, which is a healthy departure from bookbound theory. Day has much to say, again, on the social status of music and musicians. These and many other aspects in this book should be eye openers to our scholars who are more engaged in grave digging.

This work is perhaps most valued for the very excellent coloured illustrations by William Gibbs and Edith Hipkins. The author's remarks on instrument making must be carefully noted, by our instrument makers as well as those in charge of the limping Vadyalaya.

A.J. Hipkins contributes a highly sensitive Introduction.

The publishers of the reprint are to be thanked for making this work available once more. Unfortunately, the reprinting of such 'classics' have become merely money spinners and meet but barely the current epidemic of Indophilia. Surely, beside the Index, the publishers could have got a learned editorial note which could have placed Day's work in its proper place in the present context when so much more research has been done, thus enhancing the value and usefulness of the book.

B.C. Deva

**Asian Puppets; Wall of the World.** Catalogue of an exhibition presented by the University of California, Los Angeles, Museum of Cultural History, 1976, \$ 12.50.

This fabulous catalogue, profusely illustrated by hundreds of photo-

graphs with detailed technical notes and scholarly text, of the Asian tradition of puppetry, covers India, Java, Bali, Malaysia, Cambodia, Burma, Sri Lanka, China and Korea. It certainly is a fitting tribute to the Asian immigrants in America and a most colourful event of the Bicentennial Celebrations. The preface rightly puts it, "This catalogue and the related exhibition are designed to fetch comments to the cultural heritage of Asian Americans and to offer other Americans a glimpse of the intricacy and beauty of an important facet of Asian culture."

Asian puppet theatre is truly an important and integral element of the traditional culture of these societies. It reflects and sustains the ideals and values of the traditional culture. It deals with the age-old myths and legends sharing them with the audiences; has rich poetic textual material; incorporates elements from the allied performing arts and the visual arts of the region of its prevalence. It has interesting conventions and performing practices, often similar to those of the human theatre, but also sometimes radically different. It has served as an effective channel for communication not only of myths and legends but of social norms and criticism, especially through its colours, a most fascinating aspect of the Asian puppet theatre.

The catalogue with its rich materials, both textual and photographic, is able to give vivid glimpses of a great exhibition of Asian puppetry. This, to my knowledge, is the first comprehensive exhibition of the puppet theatres of Asia covering a period of several centuries and traditions of several countries. The catalogue is not merely a temporary record of an exhibition; it has acquired a permanent value of a serious scholarly work on the subject.

Various sections relating to the puppet tradition of different countries written by different scholars follow more or less a uniform pattern. There is a brief historical background, followed by a discussion of forms, materials, construction of puppets, themes, manipulation techniques and conventions of performance. This pattern gives in a nutshell the essence of these old and rich traditions of puppetry. Text is in many cases a digest of all available written materials on the subject, but it has been suitably edited, and presented creatively. Most striking point about the text in all the sections is its precision and it shows the insight of the writer into the subject. Each sectional text is followed by well planned illustrations. A select bibliography, glossary of indigenous names and technical terms given as appendix add to the utility of the catalogue.

While discussing the material, construction and decoration of the puppets, the writers have rightly emphasized the fact that the puppets, like masks, in Asian tradition are rich exquisite pieces of craft and represent the totality of the arts and crafts of the region to which they belong. In Asian tradition, particularly in Indian tradition, no difference has been maintained between the crafts and the arts, and their areas overlap and traditions inter-

mingle. They have close links and keep channels open for exchanges and constant feed back from one to the other.

The Indian section is rightly the lengthiest and richest section both in term of the text and illustrative materials. India has been said to be the home of puppetry. All the forms of puppetry the glove or hand puppets, rod puppets, string puppets and shadow or leather puppets are prevalent in India and each form has its stylistic variations within the same region or in the neighbouring linguistic and cultural regions. It is also often through the medium of puppetry that the traditional culture of a particular region overflows to the other regions, breaking down linguistically demarcated political boundaries.

Puppet theatre in India as also in the countries of South-east Asia has co-existed for centuries with the human theatre in a very close relationship of exchange of themes, textural materials, music and dance, and performing techniques and conventions. In this role it has often given more to the human than taken from it, and in many cultures, perhaps historically it preceeds the human theatre.

Since I am familiar with the research that Prof. Mel Helstein conducted in India for about a year with great dedication, I would like to mention his name in particular while reviewing this catalogue, and record my great appreciation of his work in India and his contribution to the mounting of this exhibition and production of this catalogue. I, however, hasten to add my admiration of the contribution of all other scholars, designers and artists associated with this very important event, and the production of this beautiful catalogue.

*Suresh Awasthi*

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