

BOOK REVIEWS

Traditions of Indian Theatre : M.L. Varadpande, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. Pages 104, Plates 40. First Edition 1978. Price Rs. 70.

This book is a collection of Shri M.L. Varadpande's ten scholarly essays written on the various aspects of Indian traditional and folk theatre. Published from time to time in prominent journals, including the journal of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, these essays were highly acclaimed by scholars and students of Indian theatre. The collection can be termed as one of the most significant contributions to the study of theatrical traditions of India.

The rare worth of Mr. Varadpande's book is in its inter-disciplinary approach. By and large the books on theatre have been following a set pattern. This work could go a long way to liberate us from a narrow, self-contained understanding of the Indian theatre. For he has brought into his ken various disciplines such as archaeology, epigraphy, mythology, sculpture and architecture and, of course, traditional and folk forms of dance-drama still extant in India. It is rightly said that he is a scholar with a capacity to see historical facts in a new and correct perspective, analyse them and offer an original interpretation. His chapters on Nagarjunakonda Amphitheatre, Stree Preksha: A Tradition of Female Theatre, and Prekshanaka are refreshingly new in their informative value. They provide us new insight into the facets of our theatrical traditions which were seldom taken note of.

Scholars have realised long ago that the Jataka tales and *Arthashastra* are among richest sources for understanding various facets of life in ancient India. They were, however, not put to thorough search by them for learning about the activities concerning theatre. Mr. Varadpande has done a thorough job in this respect. Assiduously collecting little bits of information and supporting his contentions by epigraphical and archaeological data he has given a composite picture of the activities related to the performing arts in ancient India.

He has also presented a detailed study of important stock characters of folk theatre like *Vidushaka* and *Sutradhar* underlining in the process the course of evolution of folk theatrical traditions of India and their mutual relationship as revealed in common stage practices. In this context his essays on *Ganesh* is remarkable. The serious students of India's ancient theatrical

traditions who want to understand and know about "very early forms of theatrical arts, the way in which they were performed, the role of temples in their development, the early theatre halls, the relationship between performing artistes and the state and various art traditions that influenced the evolution of the theatre "can turn to Mr. Varadpande's book for very authentic information.

A special mention might be made of the creative insight Mr. Varadpande has displayed in linking the assorted information and presenting it in lively and readable form. By substantiating his observation with beautiful colour and black and white plates he carries conviction of both mind eye. The book is well designed by Jyotish Dutta Gupta who has made many pages lively by his drawings and sketches.

However, one sometimes feels that further analysis of the mass of data collected by Mr. Varadpande is necessary. He may himself do the job in future for the benefit of scholars.

It is but once in decades that a work makes other books on the topic a shade out-of-date and among them Mr. Varadpande's book can easily be included. It has certainly widened the horizons of serious students of Indian theatre and given them new directions to explore.

Sunil Subhedar

The Major Traditions of North Indian Tabla Drumming. Robert S. Gottlieb. 2 vols. with 2 cassette tapes. Musikverlag Emil Katzibichler, Munich, 1977. I vol. pp. viii + 227. II vol. pp. 227; 150 DM (Rs 735/-).

The history of the *tabla* has been a very indefinitely known one and not much (*reliable*) has been written on it. There are, however, books and essays — in North Indian languages — on the various *gharana*-s and the technique of playing. Therefore Gottlieb's claim that *Previous to this study, repertoire was handed down orally through the generation from father to son*" (p. vii., italics mine) does not hold. However, not many of the Indian manuals were strict and analytical enough. And that is where this book scores, as it is very thorough, strict and analytical. The notation developed and the recordings, together, are really very helpful.

In the chapter on *Origins of Tabla*, the opening paragraph gives a very brief but, I should say, a balanced account of what might have been the early references to the instrument. But I wish he had avoided the words 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' (This pair has been in long use and goes unquestioned!); they have not much to do with Indian *musical* structure. But this is a digression. In any case the word *tabla* (not perhaps the *instrument*) was not brought

to India "early in the sixteenth century" (p. 1) but prior to the 14th. For Suddhakalasa, 1350 A.D., in his *Sangitopanisatsaroddhara* (Adh. 4, Sl. 93) includes *tabla* along with *dhol* etc. as the drums of the *mleccha*-s (Muslims) (and therefore not respectable?). For a discussion of this subject see B.C. Deva, (*Musical Instruments of India*, 1978: Firma KLM Calcutta)

The next chapter discusses the history of the six major *gharana*-s (Delhi, Farrukhabad, Lucknow, Banaras, Ajrada and Punjab). As is common the Delhi *gharana* is given the 'parental' status. There are, however, some differences between the family tree of Delhi as given here and others (cf. Satyanarayana Vasisth, *Tala Martand* 1967, and Bhagavatsaran Sarma, *Tal Prakash*, 1959) due to perhaps, mistaken nomenclature. The author has worked out and presented the family trees of all the *gharana*-s in Vol. II.

Next follow notes on the structure of the instrument (very well illustrated), tuning and *bol*-s.

The following chapter is on the *Foundations of Rhythmic Structure*. Here, some definitions might have been better put. For instance, a clearer distinction is possible between *tala* and *laya*. The former is a *cycle* of time units and the latter is the rate or speed. Similarly: *avarta* is one cycle (which may be of any length) depending upon the *tala*; it is not "the length of the time cycle" (p. 37. italics mine). It might not have been out of place for the author to have given a more detailed note on the nature of *tala* in Hindustani music. The sentence "Rhythmic variety in *Indian music*..." (p. 41. italics mine) should be more correctly "Rhythmic variety in Hindustani music" for (and I am sure the author knows this) there is much difference between the Hindustani & Karnatak systems of Indian music. While defining *theka* (p. 48) there appears to be some confusion. The *bol*-s of a *theka* do not define the number of *matra*-s. The *matra* is independent, and *theka* is a drum signature for the *tala* which of course is circumscribed by the number of *matra*-s. It would have been better if there had been a thorough discussion of *tala-theka* relationship.

The succeeding sections on *vistar* and style are succinct, but relevant. The author's analysis of the features of the various *gharana*-s is carefully done. The notation system, as developed here, is a good and useful tool.

The main and the most important part of this work is the *Commentary*. (Vol. I. 94 — 200) which is a detailed analysis of the performances of artistes recorded (The full transcriptions are given Vol. II). It covers:

Inam Ali Khan : (Delhi *gharana*) — *mohra*, *peshkar*, *kaida*-s, *tukda*,
cakradar

Karamatullah Khan : (Farrukhabad *gharana*) — *peshkar*, *calan*, *kaida*-s
rela, *tipalli gat*, *cakradar*, *tihai*.

Wazid Hussain Khan (Lucknow *gharana*) — *peshkar, cakradar, theka, rela gat, kaida, paran, dupalli gat, akal, anagat*, etc.

Kishan Maharaj (Banaras) : *uthan, theka, badhat, bant, rela, tukda,*

Habibuddin Khan (Ajrada) : *Kaida-s, rela*

Allarakha Khan (Punjab) : *uthan, theka, peshkar, kaida, rela, cakradar, gitang, cchand, savai*

The commentary and notes therein have, of course, to be studied along with the recordings (2 cassettes) provided.

A better elucidation would have been to extract one or two of each patterns and analyse them against the definition adopted.

A very useful glossary is included in Vol. I.

Vol. II contains the complete transcriptions of the performances artistes listed above.

This work by Gottlieb is a fine contribution to the study of *tabla* playing. There are not many books — if at all — even in Indian languages which are so lucid and analytical.

B.C. Deva

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