

BOOK REVIEWS

Siva in Dance, Myth and Iconography: Anne Marie Gaston, Oxford University Press, 1982, Rs. 200/-.

Siva as Nataraja, the presiding diety at the great south Indian shrine in Chidambaram, is regarded as the lord of dance, and many of the songs used in Bharata Natyam refer to this association. More than any other diety, dance is associated with the mythology of Siva, forming in its most exalted aspect a metaphor for the cosmic cycle of creation and destruction and the individual cycle of birth and re-birth. In many other myths too, Siva is portrayed as dancing.

Anne Marie Gaston, the dancer from Canada has been a serious student of Indian classical dances and has specialised in Bharata Natyam and Odissi and has also studied Kathakali and Kuchipudi. She has been involved with the study of the Indian classical dances and the related texts and sculptures for the last fifteen years. The book under review is based on her M. Litt thesis for the Department of Oriental Studies, Oxford University, under the guidance of Professor Richard Gombrich, Boden Professor of Sanskrit.

Two books relevant to this topic have preceded in India, viz., Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature by C. Sivaramamurti, and Indian Classical Dance in Literature and the Arts by Kapila Vatsyayan. An image of Siva is a veritable encyclopaedia of mythological references. The author-dancer is fascinated by the inter-relationship between the dance and sculpture and has delved deep in to the study of the various Nataraja images evolving a definite methodology. In order to interpret both the dance and the iconography, one constantly falls back on the mythology for explanations. She includes those myths which involve the dance of Siva. Any student of classical Indian dance is familiar with the several myths employed by a dancer in the dance of Siva. The most prominent ones are *Tripurantaka*, *Ardhanarisvara*, *Kalarimurti*, *Gajasurasamharamurti*, *Bhikshatana*, *Virabhadra*, *Bhairava* and *Vinadhara*. The author narrates successfully which of these aspects are considered most important within the living traditions in different regional styles. These were influenced by the visual and literary traditions.

The author has selected Siva sculptures from the earliest times to

about A.D. 1450 dividing them chronologically into four periods and geographically into four regions. In doing so the author sets out to further the understanding of development of iconography of Nataraja and other dancing images of Siva both regionally and chronologically and shows how it relates to decorative dancing figures and to the depiction of Saivite stories in the living dance traditions. In doing so she has drawn together many disparate facets of Hindu culture and has attempted to link together many things not connected earlier.

Of the seven chapters, chapter VI describing the associated mythology and the ways in which they are depicted in dance is well handled as the author has intimate knowledge of the techniques of dance and is also equipped to illustrate it with competence. It also contributes in a lucid manner in explaining the inter-relationship of mythology, iconography and dance.

The author marshalls several evidences necessary to support her thesis. The table II which details the summary of synonym among the names of dance poses according to various texts is an example of her thorough understanding of the accounts of iconographic and sculptural studies. The various *natyasastra* texts and the *agama* texts are compared to bring out the differences and major points of agreement. The classification into Type C-I, D and A is illustrated in a logical manner. The illustrations make the point clear. Her attempt in classifying the sculptures depicted in dance poses based on the main positions of the feet exhibited in images of Siva in Table 2 has an advantage of comparison with the sculptures and the living traditions. The comparative photographs of the Bharata Natyam and the Odissi dance forms enhance the inter-relationship.

Similarly, the *hastas* compared with the *natyasastra* texts and the *hastas* found in iconography are illustrated with numerous photographs which help the reader in understanding the similarities. This classification of the Nataraja images forms the basic methodology of her study. While doing so she has taken care of emphasising the fact that the *karana* sculptures are cadences of movement and not the static poses. Therefore she avoids the confusion which is seen in earlier writers like Gopinath Rao. She also has sought clarification taking into account the classification according to the dance poses based on the *agama* texts.

The various photographs of the varieties of Nataraja show the different attitudes, arms and body positions. Ranging from the Gupta period Nataraja of Nachna Kuthara from Uttar Pradesh to illustration of the *Lalatatilaka karana* of Siva from Airavatesvara temple from southern region, the author has analysed the images in terms of the *natyasastra* dance terminology and clearly indicated her classification based on the position of the feet. This section is rich in visuals and provides to a dancer innumerable postures which

he can incorporate in to the dance choreography. This detailed study should provide serious students of dance sufficient material for dance imagery.

Chapter V deals with the components of Nataraja image. The figures of Apasmara (Muyalagan), Nandi, Kartikeya, Ganesa, musicians, Bhiringi and Dikpalas, figure in the dance of Siva. The literary text often refers to these figures and the dancer enacting or narrating the dance of Siva, in the scheme of *ekaharya abhinaya* depicts these figures. That which is shown in the sculptures with several figures thus finds in the language of dance depiction through one dancer and the images are created in virtual space. The impression is further enhanced by the symbolic presentation and the fleeting images. Whereas the focus in the thesis is on the Nataraja images the author has also described in the first chapter the topic of dance in Indian society. The literary, the inscriptional, the sculptural and the detailed historical evidences based on the travellers' accounts are documented in a systematic manner and suggest the pains taken by the author to reconstruct the history of dance in India. It is concise and yet full of information. It deals at length on the institution of the *devadasis* and reinforces the argument that the *devadasis* were mainly responsible for the continuity of the dance tradition.

The appendice and the map sum up the methodology along with the tables. The book contains more than 150 photographs which support the text and the study. There is a glossary and an index along with a bibliography which are in keeping with the scholastic study. Anne Marie Gaston who was also assisted by her husband Mr. Gaston during her stay in India has indeed proved her scholarship in a well documented and convincing manner that has an added advantage of the practical knowledge of the dance techniques. Her study is serious and is a welcome addition to the scholarly works on the classical Indian dance forms.

—Sunil Kothari

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Kathak in Raigarh : Pandit Kartikram (Hindi), Rajkamal Prakashan, 1982. Rs. 25/-.

Kathak in Raigarh is one of the most authentic accounts of how Kathak developed in the erstwhile Raigarh State in Madhya Pradesh in the forties. Since it is written by none other than the leading exponent of Raigarh Pandit Kartikram, it gives the readers a first hand account of the history of Kathak during the reign of Raja Chakradharsingh. Though the names of Kartik and Kalyan, the two most famous dancers were known in the forties and the fifties, they had gone in to oblivion after the demise of the king who was a great patron of classical dance and music. After the independence and his death, this most gifted pair of the dancers had as it were

lost their inspiration and support and as a result of which they were not much heard of or seen on concert platforms or in major music and dance conferences.

In the sixties when Marg brought out a special issue on Kathak an interesting essay on the contribution of the Raja of Raigarh by Prof Mohan Khokar detailed the achievements of these dancers and the contribution of Raja Chakradharsingh in promoting Kathak. But till 1975 neither Kartikram nor Kalyandas had received any special attention from the serious scholars or patrons of the arts. Kalyandas was teaching at the Khairagarh University and Kartikram had practically retired in his village looking after his land. His son Ramlal, who is also a talented Kathak exponent used to give tutitions in Kathak in nearby places. Prof. Ashirvadam of Khairagarh University had started working on the history of Kathak in Raigarh for his doctoral thesis and in 1977 during the Kathak seminar organised by Kathak Kendra most of the Kathaks and participants in the seminar had an occasion to see the art of Kartikram who was invited to Delhi in the Seminar.

He was also given a junior fellowship of Rs. 500 by the Department of Culture, Ministry of Education, Government of India for a period of two years to write the history of Kathak in Raigarh and give details of the compositions of the various gurus and Raja Chakradhar. With the help of his son Ramlal, Kartikram submitted his report which forms the basis of the present slim volume under review.

Kartikram who is past 73 now had his early training in the folk dances of Madhya Pradesh under the guidance of his uncle Makhanlal who was the leader of a dance troupe. During the Ganeshotsava festival in Raigarh his dancing impressed the ruler Chakradharsingh who took a fancy for him and trained him in to a fine Kathak dancer in his court. At that time there were great Kathak gurus like Jailalji, Acchan Maharaj, Shivanarayan, Mohanlal, Sunderprasad, Hanumanprasad and others who imparted training in Kathak to Kartikram and later on to Kalyandas. There were others like Firtudas and Barmanlal who too received training from these stalwarts. Along with Kartikram's son Ramlal these are the five most important exponents of Raigarh Kathak.

Chakradharsingh had the passion for the twin arts of dance and music and like Wajidali Shah, the Nawab of Lucknow, he appears to be one immersed in the art of Kathak. His durbar was peopled by the great exponents and he spent most of his time composing the bols and the verses, which form a sizable body of Kathak compositions. Besides the bols of the Jaipur and the Lucknow gharana, the Raja himself composed various bols and enriched the nritya and the nritya aspect of Kathak. Thus the Kathak in Raigarh durbar took an exquisite combination of the salient features of

both the Lucknow and the Jaipur gharana. In the forties the Raja sent Kartik ram and Kalyandas to the major dance and music conferences and there were very few to equal them. They won several gold medals and honours.

However, after the Raja's demise both the dancers lost all support. They were relegated in to background. Some attempts were made to bring them to Delhi in the fifties but Kartikram did not stay for long and chose to return to Raigarh and his native village. And they were practically forgotten. But again in the late seventies they were discovered and the Madhya Pradesh Government and the department of culture brought Kartikram to Bhopal to head the dance institution named after Raja Chakradhar. All attempts are made to revive the tradition which took roots in Raigarh in the forties and though Kartikram is at a sufficiently advanced age, with the help of his son the institution is doing a splendid work in preserving the Kathak heritage as developed in the forties under the great masters.

The second part of the book deals with the notation of the bols of Kathak and contains compositions of Raja Chakradharsingh. This is a rare collection of bols and is indeed most valuable. Ramlal has given notation for the compositions of Achhan Maharaj, Jailalji, Shivanarayan, and Raja Chakradhar. Among the interesting features of Raja Chakradhar's compositions are the exquisite bols of different textures of sounds. These are quite different from those which are generally performed. The bols of the birds are woven imaginatively in these compositions. The imageries are striking. For instance, in *Matsyakhadgavali*, the words of the *Kilakila* bird the sounds of the thunder and storm as reflected in *Dalbada trichakri*, the humming of the bee in *Madhugunjan*, the gathering of the clouds in *Meghpushpa*, the *Tandavas* of Durga, Kali with powerful mnemonic syllables, resonant with the sounds of the *mantras*, the chants, the *bandishes* of *Amritdhwani*, the sounds of the bullets as in *Topkhona*, the thematic bols as in *Madanak paran* wherein the incident of the burning of cupid is suggested, the *lasya* of Radha and Krishna, the *Tandava* of Shiva, the Sanskrit nomenclatures of innumerable compositions like *Kallolini*, *Shringar-var-dhana*, *Ratipriya*, *Shrutibushana*, *Rudravilasa*, *Ratnasanu*, *Trivishtapa*, *Maitravaruna*, *Brahmabija*, *Arthavanapratijnasatyasamkalpa*, *Suvarnaraji* and others reveal the imaginative approach of the Raja and his associates.

The Raja has also composed several thumris and songs for dance which follow the tradition. He wrote under the name of Chakrapiya and Farhat for *thumris* and *gazel* respectively. His *Khamsas* were also danced by Kartikram and Kalyandas for *bhavapradarshan* and *abhinaya*. He followed the tradition and did not much deviate in his compositions. He had a scholarly approach as can be seen from the various *shastra granthas* he wrote with the help of the learned sanskrit scholars and the gurus. There is a text of *Nartanasurvasya* which appears to be the most important *shastra*

grantha for Kathak. It is time some scholars worked on this rare manuscript. The *Talatyanidhi* deals with the talas, the *Ragaratna Manjusha* deals with the ragas and the raginis and the *Muraja Varna Pushpakara* contains the compositions for both dance and percussion.

The book under review would have gained in pictorial value as a book on dance with the photographs of the artistes and the Raja as well as of Motimahar and Badal Mahar. The photographs would provide the reader a glimpse into the past and would inspire younger generation of Kathak dancers. In the second edition this lacuna could be filled in. Ustad Allaudin Khan Sangeet Akademi, Bhopal, deserves congratulations for bringing out a valuable book on much neglected aspect of Kathak and its major exponents.

—Sunil Kothari