BOOK REVIEWS

The Saman Chants—a Review of Research: G.H. Tarlekar; Indian Musicological Society, Baroda, 1985; Rs 85.

THE ORIGIN of Indian music has been traced to the Vedas in India. The Sāmaveda, very early declared to be the Yoni of music—*asya yonir bhavet gânam*—had also come to acquire the highest status among the four Samhitās: *vedānām sāmavedosmi*. Therefore one must pay the most careful attention to the nature of the Sāman chants, not only to trace the history of our music but also to discover the ethos of musical practice in Vedic culture.

Sāmaveda was elevated to the highest position among the vedas perhaps because it was the least utilitarian. Of course it conferred benefit, but such as was unseen—*adriṣṭaphala*; all the same it was essential to the total scheme of a public sacrifice. The chants thus are the earliest known example of socially performed music which drew upon secular practices and grew to sacred status.

The history of our music begins with three sounds which were used for all purposes—folk songs, wails, ululations, jubiliations, sacred chanting. In due course there was a progress to four, five and finally the seven notes of the *saptaka*. Whereas for secular purpose the *saptaka* was used with great freedom and tonal innovation, for the Sāman chants singing was limited mostly to the three notes *udātta*, *anudātta* and *svarita*, the rest of the scale being used very sparingly.

Non-Sāman music, which by the purāṇic age had come to be known as gāndharva, became a world apart from Vedic chants. A need was then felt to relate the two, to analyze and define the Vedic sounds in terms of the notes and scales of Gāndharva. The *Sikṣās* of Nārada and Pāṇini were written to do this job. The practice in Sāman chants of using only higher, lower and middle notes along with some additions was sought to be translated into the fundamental scales or *grāmas* (gamut?) of early musicology. This effort was made in *circa* 5th century B.C. and yielded ambiguous results. The enigma has remained to this day. Prof. Tarlekar's collection is an admirable attempt to present in one book the modern efforts to solve the problem.

The book aims at presenting a summary of the views of divers scholars right from the time of A.C. Burnell (1876)—nearly a hundred years of thought on the subject. It is meant to be a

synopsis for anyone embarking on further research putting down succintly the conclusions that eminent musicologists like Fox-Strangways, Hoogt, V. Raghavan and B.C. Deva of the older generation and Kaufmann, B.R. Sharma, S. Seetha and Wayne Howard of the later have arrived at. It also includes the researches of authors in Hindi and Marathi.

The work is more than a simple review as Prof. Tarlekar has given his own comments on the researches of each scholar whose work is summarized. The comments are sizable, at times extensive, and indicate a coherent position on the various problems of defining the technical terms of Sāman chants. Much of the criticism Prof. Tarlekar offers is in the nature of correctives based on present-day practice. He has recorded, as part of his extensive study, Sāma Gāna as it survives today.

However, the problems of defining the large number of technical terms used in Sāma Gāna are as tricky as ever. At the very outset there is little consensus on the nature of *udātta, anudātta* and *svarita*. The ancient grammarians and the *Śikśās* have defined *svarita* as a note somewhere in between *udātta* and *anudātta*, but in present-day practice it is sounded higher than *udātta*. Since Fox-Strangways there has been an attempt to explain this deviation. In this book one sees the many ways in which musicologists have tried to solve the riddle. Perhaps the change in the nature of *svarita* came about in the last millenium only. As late as the 11th century Abhinavagupta defined *svarita* as the note of *samāhāra*. It is also not likely that Abhinava was following the earlier śastric definitions without paying attention to the practice of his day. While analyzing the *śruti* quantum of Gāndharva notes, he calls the four-*śruti* notes *udātta*, the two-*śruti* ones *anudātta* and the three-*śruti* notes *svarita*. No note can have more than four *śrutis* and none less than two, but the three-*śruti* note can vary in pitch as it has the possibility of gaining or losing a *śruti*. In Gāndharva the three-*śruti* note is used for *kampa*. So is the *svarita* used for *kampa* by *śrotris:*

Catuśrutirudāttah uccatvāt; dvihśrutiranudāttah nicaistvāt; trišrutih svaritah madhyavartitayā samāharatvāt. Tathā hi svarita eva kampitvam vyavahāranti śrotriyāh. Ihapyalankāreśu striśruteh kampanam vakśyate.

In this way we see that till Abhinava's time *svarita* was not higher that *udātta;* it was still the middle accent. That is why by analogy the three-*śruti* Gandharva note such as Ri or Dha could be called *svarita*.

Only a few scholars have admitted the theoretical definition of *svarita*. Most have been

occupied with the task of finding out the notations for Sāman chants. Here again there is the modern scale and its notation and the notation given by the *Śikṣās* in terms of the ancient scale. There is the task of deciphering the ancient *grāma-mūrcchanā* scale. Here the consensus seems to be that the Śadjagrāma Sa *mūrcchanā* is modern Kāphî or Kharaharapriyā. But the *Śikṣās* themselves are not unanimous in their notations for Sāma Gāna. Are the seven notes, Prathama, etc. to begin with Madhyama (of Gāndharva) or Kruṣṭa (Pancama)? The question remains unanswered.

Although the usual number of notes in Sāman chants is only three, all seven are used and the scale itself is thought by some to be an evolution from Sāma Gāna. Such is the view of scholars like S. Seetha. Prof. Tarlekar himself thinks that to the three accents Ri, Sa, Ni first of all Dha was added, then the Sāmavedins started using Ma, then Ga, and finally they added Pa to complete the seven notes which became the *saptak* transferred to secular uses as well. But this hypothesis does not take into account the process of perception of consonances or *samavāda-darśan* even as it takes place with beginners in music. There is little reason to believe that Sāman chanting was the only laboratory of scale discovery. This must have been a secular process as well and once completed may have been absorbed by the Sāmagās. For instance Ma and Sa and Pa are the most easily perceived consonances. But Dha (as a third from Ma) could be perceived by the specially gifted (*dhivan*) only. Dhaivat once located on the scale would allow Ri to be fixed and Ni could be added last of all as a consonant to Ma. The Sāman singers to begin with only used the notes approximate to their exact positions at relatively higher or lower pitches. The exact relative pitches based on consonance were perhaps fixed by secular musicians with the help of complicated string instruments. Sāma Gāna by its nature and ethos has been conservative not experimental. It might have right from the start drawn upon certain prevalent melodic phrases for its tonal structure as noticed by Wayne Howard. It is true that the viṇā was employed in Sāma Gāna to make it more pleasing to the deities but the element of pleasure was subdued. It was the job of secular music to innovate and bend to public taste and finally develop into Gāndharva. The purpose of Gāndharva was avoided in Sāma Gāna which was kept distinct by antiqueness.

As shown in the book some scholars have equated *svarita* with the drone or *sthāyî svara* of

current music. We cannot be too sure if there was any drone at all in ancient music. The tānpurā/tambūrā is a medieval instrument. All ancient viṇās like the Mahati of Nārada or Bharata's Mattakokilā or Vipañci were harps or lyres. The tonic was presumed to coincide with any note of the scale as wished and was not droned as nowadays.

There are many other aspects of the technical terms in Sāman chants that are extensively and variously discussed. Sāman Gatraviṇā, *stobhāksaksaras* and the medieval system of notation by numerals as found in family manuscripts of Sāmavedins are all given with Prof. Tarlekar's learned comments.

One may conclude by saying that the project of reviewing the research on this subect will indeed be very helpful, not only to future researchers but those who may wish to produce a similar digest/review of research on some other subject such as ancient grammar, the Brahamanas, musical instruments or even Kamaśāstra. The Indian Musicological Society is to be commended for its effort in the publication of this book, aided by a grant from Sangeet Natak Akademi. One only wishes more money were available for better printing/production.

BHARAT GUPT

World of Other Faces—Indian Masks: Jiwan Pani; Publications Division, Delhi, 1986; 54 pages; Rs 75.
Living Dolls—Story of Indian Puppets: Jiwan Pani; Publications Division, Delhi, 1986; 58 pages; Rs 75.

CONSIDERING the widespread and growing interest in the folk and traditional performing arts, it is disappointing to find such few publications on the various aspects of our theatre. We have a surfeit of festivals and spend lavishly on Utsavs but rarely do these events tie up with brochures or handbooks brought out to celebrate such ephemeral events in a more lasting manner. The brochure that may accompany a festival is usually but a scrappy affair, more an excuse to collect funds from advertisers than an effort to provide information of a worth-while nature.

Sangeet Natak Akademi in its thirty-four years of existence has but a handful of monographs on a few theatre forms to its credit, but no definitive book on traditional theatre, despite the extensive coverage by its Documentation Unit, which is often the main source of illustrations for articles and fea-

tures on such subjects. Balwant Gargi's *Folk Theatre of India* (1966), J.C. Mathur's *Drama in Rural India* (1964) and Kapila Vatsyayan's *Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams* (1981) are a few publications on our traditional theatre. Taking an overall view of the subject, these works have not been detailed studies of any particular form, such as works Yakshagana or Kathakali have inspired.

The monographs under review, issued by the Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, are therefore a most welcome addition heralding, it is to be hoped, a series of works on various aspects of folk and traditional theatre.

Jiwan Pani, was an excellent choice to write on Indian masks and puppets. He has been intimately connected with building up the resource material of the Documentation Unit of Sangeet Natak Akademi for several years, travelling with his colleagues to remote corners of the country, contacting folk artistes personally, watching performances in their own locale, under existing rural conditions. Moreover, Pani is an Oriya poet of standing and also a well-reputed scholar in forms of dance such as Odissi and Chhau. He brings a knowledge of Sanskrit and the classics to bear on his work and infuses his insight with that unique lyrical empathy which is the hallmark of the poetic vision. Even where one differs from his viewpoint, one is charmed by his manner of expression and captivated by his enthusiasm.

In the prefaces to both these works, Pani strikes a strictly personal note. He pays rare and warm tribute to his colleagues who shared an exciting and rewarding period of discovery with him when they travelled on collections and documentation assignments for the Akademi.

In the introduction to *World of Other Faces* the author argues that the mask in primitive society is the result of man's myth-making faculty, the wearer—priest or sorcerer—assuming magical powers. Indeed, the power of the mask in ritual is such that not only is the priest imbued with the spirit of the deity invoked but the participants too are caught up in the ecstatic experience communicated by the mask-in-action. Anyone who has witnessed elaborate masked rituals such as the Devil Dances of Kerala is aware of this phenomenon even in communities very far removed from the primitive. In contemporary theatre the potency of the mask is a powerful dramatic device, invoking a palpable collective response.

In the first two chapters—'Mask and Ritual' and 'Mask and Theatre'—Pani differentiates between the mythic role and

mystic aspect of the mask in ritual from its dramatic assumption of character portrayal in theatre. He gives a fairly extensive coverage of existing forms of ritual and traditional theatre to substantiate his point. Here one would have welcomed a more detailed examination of some of the more developed and complex forms, but for this we may have to wait for monographs devoted solely to a single form of traditional theatre.

In his final chapter the author gives some idea of the renewed interest of contemporary playwrights in utilizing the mask-as-metaphor to add another dimension to a theme and to heighten and extend the dramatic effect of an idea.

The main attraction of *Living Dolls* is the author's well-argued case for a revival of puppet theatre as an entertainment and an effective means of education, not only for children in schools but for adults in programmes of civic and social awareness and of health.

The detailed incident of how the author along with the Documentation Unit of the Akademi searched for, and finally found, the only living master of the art of Ravanchhaya makes for poignant reading. As Pani remarks, many such traditional forms are fast disappearing. Although it is inevitable that some cannot survive, they can at least be recorded and preserved in publications for future generations.

Monographs of this type need to be widely distributed and read. Unfortunately the format chosen by Publications Division is impractical and cumbersome. The binding leaves much to be desired, the unwieldy hard cover being an unnecessary expense. Colour illustrations are essential for any work on theatre and they have been generously used here, but the quality of colour-printing is poor. Occasionally the transparency used seems discoloured or faded. Such illustrations give an incorrect impression and should have been eliminated. Even the black-and-white reproduction is uneven. This is a drawback to an endeavour that deserved better.

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