BOOK REVIEWS

The Tabla of Lucknow

A Cultural Analysis of a Musical Tradition

James Kippen

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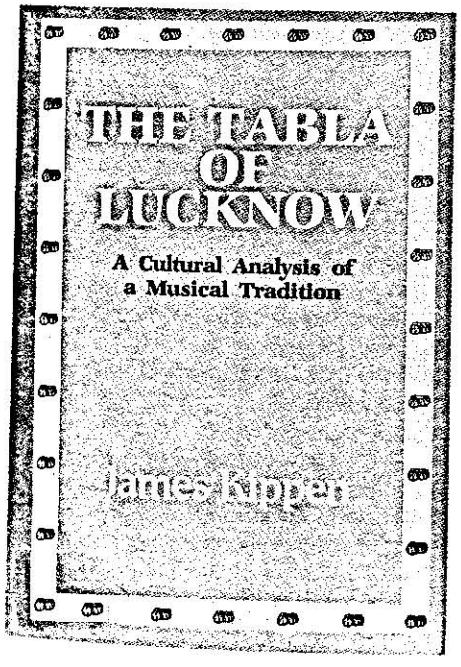

The book opens with a short commentary on the organology and nomenclature of the Tablā. The author describes here the necessary components of a pair of Tablās. (It may be noted in passing that whether the two drums are used to present a solo item or to provide accompaniment, only the Tablā, or 'the right one', is tuned to the basic musical note or *swara*. The Bānyā, 'the left one', is never so tuned; it is kept to a very low note, only to provide depth and better resonance to the *bols* or their patterns. I may add that in the technical parlance of the *gharānās*, the Tablā is considered to be female or *mādā* and the Bānyā *nar* or male.

The notation system explained by the author and the notation of Jhaptāl given by him are both correct. But I find it impossible to agree with him in respect of the *bols* or alphabets which he uses in notating the structure of Jhaptāl. Instead of *dhi* and *ti*, the alphabets should be *dhin* and *tin*. *Dhi*, when executed on the Tablā, produces a closed sound which is non-resonating. Now, this type of sound can be produced in two forms, either as *dhitt*, or *dhita*. Further, *dhitt* is executed on the edge of the Tablā with all the fingers together, and coupled with a simultaneous non-resonating stroke of the Bānyā alphabet, as in the phrase *dhitt, dhitt, trakadhit*. *Dhita* is produced on the *syāhi* in the middle area of the *puri*, as in the phrase *dhita, dhita, tage, tita*. Both the alphabets thus produce a closed sound.

In Jhaptāl, *dhi* or *dhin* is played on the *lāvā* or *maidan* area of the *puri*, necessarily and technically with the first finger (tarjani), so as to produce, in the end, an open sound. Hence, logically and practically, the correct alphabets should be *dhin* and *tin* in place of *dhi* and *ti*. Surprisingly, but in fact, *dhi* is never played as a separate entity. It is always executed in combination with other alphabets, which either precede or follow this alphabet. The author seems to have been misguided by the example of some *ustāds* who, it is amusing to note, recite incorrectly, but play quite correctly. Such errors go ill with the work's overall excellence and are likely to misguide a student.

Happily, the note on the notation of rhythm is as it should be. Reference to additional devices is on the whole all right, but is a little confusing in places. It should have been explained more clearly, with the help of illustrations.

On page xvii, the correct word *chakradār*

has been wrongly spelt *chakkardār*. The word *chakra* in Hindi means 'circle' or 'round'. In the language of Tablā, the term *chakradār* means playing a fixed phrase or a full-length composition three or nine times. A *chakradār*, a *chakradār gat* or *paran* or a *chakradār tripalli gat* all appear to describe a circle or round in the way indicated, the differences between them being only structural.

In the context of stroke symbols, the author has attempted to explain the exact execution of a few syllables on the Tablā and Bānyā with the help of figures which are correct. On page xix, he says that the two strokes known as *tā*, played on the *kinār* and *sur*, are arguably the most important in Tablā-playing. Here, however, a matter of detail may be noted. If *tā* is played on the *sur* or *maidan* area with the first finger, the stroke may be mistaken for *tin*, which is also played at the same point with a similar action of the first finger. The author is either ignorant of this fact or has failed to remember it. The truth is that the Lucknow style of Tablā playing has been much influenced by Pakhāwaj technique. Most of the Lucknow *gats*, *tukrās* and other compositions are executed in the middle area of the *puri*. Hence, to facilitate execution of various compositions, the drummers of this *gharānā* mostly played *dhā* on the *maidān* because it was inconvenient to make the first finger spring back and play *dhā* on the *kinār* when the rest of the alphabets or *bols* had to be played on or around the *syāhī*.

On page xx the strokes explaining the execution of *tit*, *na*, *te*, *ti*, *tak*, etc., are correct. So are the points of playing the various Bānyā strokes as shown in figures 3 and 4.

The geography of Avadh and the city of Lucknow as shown in the maps appear to be authentic.

In the first chapter, the author has successfully depicted the geographical aspects and the cultural and social traditions of Lucknow. These have been discussed elaborately, and they make up a up factual account. The data collected by the author, by talking to various people and from available literature, is reliable.

It is well known that in earlier times most of the patronage to musicians and dancers came from the courts and the aristocracy. Musicians were also employed in the *kothās* of prostitutes. There were no private programmes, except in the circles of musicians themselves.

The types of music prevailing in Lucknow during the time of the Nawabs have been referred to in detail. The relations between the Nawabs and their musicians have been interestingly discussed. Some anecdotes about the eccentric mutual attitudes of both are narrated amusingly.

The author has mentioned Bakshu Khan's migration from Delhi to Lucknow, the eminence of the city as a centre of Kathak, and the place of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in its artistic, cultural, and musical life.

On page 22 (last paragraph), the author has described well the style of Tabla peculiar to the Lucknow *gharānā*. Since the players provided accompaniment to prostitutes (*tawāifs*) who danced and sang *thumris* and *ghazals* and also accompanied Kathak dancers, many Tablā players of other *gharānās* label the Lucknow *gharānā* or *bāj* as *Nātch-karan-bāj* which, in my view, is not quite correct.

In the first part of the second chapter the author has discussed at length the internal working and planning of All India Radio and Doordarshan as well as those of some teaching institutions which, according to me, does not touch the main subject of study.

It is true, as the author says in this chapter, that the *gandā-bandhan* ceremony is a landmark in the life of a student because it relates him intimately to the teacher as the latter's 'personal' pupil. But, to my mind, the most important aspect of this tradition is the kind of relationship that is required to be *maintained*—and is not just formally and initially established by the ceremony—

between the teacher and the taught. Both have to remain true to each other, the pupil as a devoted and obedient learner, and the teacher as a watchful and kindly instructor. Only then can the relation retain the sanctity it is credited with.

On page 41, in the last para, *pūrnima* has been misspelt as *purnama*.

Lucknow was certainly a famous centre of *tāwaifs*. Their way of life, their problems and social relationships have been ably brought out by the author. Almost every Sārangi or Tablā player representing one *gharānā* or the other worked with the *tāwaifs* as a teacher or accompanist. The Sārangi player, who in most cases would be the teacher as well, received better emoluments from the *tawāifs* than the Tabla player.

In the third chapter, under different heads, the author has intelligently discussed the living conditions of musicians, the occasions and places where they met, attendance at music concerts, rivalries among Muslim and Hindu musicians, the differences between musicians' status on the basis of quality or otherwise, variables in the form of blood relations, the general behaviour of musicians serving in an institution, and the differences between soloists and accompanists.

Politics, competition and conflicts have always been, and will probably remain, a part of musicians' lives. But *dangals* or *muquāblas*—or competitive concerts—were arranged by the Nawābs, Mahārājās and the élite of the time for their personal enjoyment, and as entertainment for their courtiers. This eccentric practice has been well projected by the author in the narration of a duel between a Pakhāwaj player and a Kathak dancer.

In this chapter the author has again discussed the inner workings of some established institutions, his purpose being to expose evils such as favouritism in appointments. What he says here may well be true, but such statements can always be challenged. The whole exercise is, in my view, unnecessary.

In Chapter 4, on the Tablā *gharānās* in Lucknow, the author has correctly defined the term *gharānā* and its allied concepts. The six essential qualifications for a *gharānā* listed are acceptable. It may be noted here that *khāndān, birādari* and *gharānā* are all interrelated terms. Musicians belonging to any one of these are blood relations. It is incorrect to believe that only soloists represented particular *gharānās* and not accompanists. The author rightly contends that there is actually no such distinction. The term *gharānā* is a polyseme, and is used both as a technical and colloquial term.

The history and origin of the Lucknow *gharānā* given by the author is correct, and would be generally accepted by musicians of all other *gharanas*. A word about the genealogy of the *gharānā* may not be out of place. Khalifā Munne Khan, a 19th-century stalwart of the *gharānā*, was closely associated with Bindādīn and Kalkāprasad, the legendary Kathak dancers. He was an extraordinary performer and a composer as well. His exquisite compositions truly represent the richness of the Lucknow *gharānā*. After the demise of Munne Khan, Abid Hussain Khan emerged as a great exponent of the *gharānā*. After Abid Hussain Khan came Wajid Hussain Khan; and then Afaq Hussain Khan, the former's son. It is painful to note that both father and son had to face hard times, and do odd jobs to make a living.

Contrary to the author, I see no difference between the Kothiwal and Lucknow *gharānās* as may warrant our crediting them with distinct identities. The representatives of both these *gharānās* are blood relations.

There have always been, and there will always be, changes in the perceptions and attitudes of Tablā players and listeners, discussed by the author in Chapter 5.

It is not unjustifiable to say that today most players depend on virtuosity which appeals to a common listener. It is also true,

though painful to note, that a well dressed artiste gets better response than a simply attired Tablā player. Musical gimmicks have become a major source of attraction for modern audiences. The emphasis of most Tablā players is decidedly more on speed than correct execution of compositions.

The author says that there is no such thing as a correct structure or order for a solo Tablā performance. Here, I slightly disagree. Every *gharānā* has a particular system and a fixed sequence of compositions for a solo recital. The system may well differ from *gharānā* to *gharānā*, but within a *gharānā* a definite order of presentation holds.

The author has understood well the content of *kāydā*, and the rules pertaining to its presentation. It is admitted on all hands that the alphabets used in *permutations* of a particular *kāydā* should in no case be new additions, i.e., those that have not appeared in its *main structure*. To prove his point, the author has cited a very popular Delhi *gharānā kāydā* whose main alphabet is *tita*. *Tirkit* or *dhirkit*, he says, should not be used in the subsequent development of this *kāydā* because they do not appear in its main structure. In this context, I am pained to say that the late Inam Ali Khan's declaration that he alone could play the *kāydā* correctly is not quite true, and does not show awareness of actual rhythmic practice.

There has been a lot of change in the style of Tablā accompaniment. The old players preferred the *larhant* style, while players today like the *sawāl-jawab* style of accompaniment.

In Chapter 6, on learning the Tablā, the author has systematically discussed the essentials of *gharānā* training. The term *tālīm* includes every aspect of training, the course and content of which are never quite fixed. It all depends, essentially, on the receptivity of the student. A good student can always extract more from his teacher than a less responsive and dedicated student. The ultimate end of true *tālīm* is, and should be, to stimulate creativity in both the pupil and the teacher.

The technique of sound production comes in for discussion in this chapter. The right sound can be produced only if the player can execute the various alphabets on the *kinār*, *maidān*, and *siyāhī* points. For sweetness in the execution of *bols*, however, it is just as necessary that a player should be possessed of a feeling for beauty, as distinguished from mere technical competence, though it is difficult to decide whether some excellences of playing, like the ability to make the most of differences in the intensity of strokes, are aesthetic or merely technical.

Technique in Tablā-playing is to achieve *nikās* or an outlet for the sound (or rhythmic utterance/execution of *bols*). There is certainly a basic difference between the technique of softer and heavier *bols*. To be more precise, the technique of executing a *kāydā* is entirely different from the technique or *nikās* of *tukrās*, *gats* and *parans*.

Repertoire in this context means the stock of compositions a student secures from his guru. Every *gharānā* has its own repertoire of compositions. It is really as much by virtue of the richness of its repertoire as on its ability to produce good *shāgirds* that a *gharānā* is able to flourish as one.

Discussing *riaz* or practice the author has referred to the observance of *Chillā*. *Chillā* has a religious connotation—the 40 days of Lent when devotees fast and pray. The purpose of the practice is to inspire a student to engage in intensive, sustained, and self-critical practice. *Chillā* is to the art of rhythm what *swādhyāya* is in theoretical learning.

In Chapter 7, on Lucknow Tablā technique, the author mentions the variety of playing postures adopted by Tablā players. Players may differ individually in this regard, but the right posture is one which keeps the whole body as a coordinated and fairly relaxed unit. According to my knowledge and experience, the basic posture and hand positions shown in the photograph of

Afaq Hussain are the only sensible ones. All great masters of the past, I may add, have followed the same disposition of the body.

I am pleasantly surprised to know that Afaq Hussain understands the importance of normal breathing while playing. Not many Tablā players show such awareness. Usually, breathing tends to follow the sporadic spurts or growing pace of the hands, with the result that the player unconsciously becomes tense and gets exhausted earlier than he should.

It *is* technically correct to say that motor movements are modified in particular contexts to facilitate easy and fluent execution of syllables. The various strokes explained and notated are the typical Lucknow *gharānā* strokes. The photographs and sketches here make for added authenticity.

Chapter 8, on repertoire, speaks well for the author's understanding and insight. Here the comparative account of Lucknow and other *gharānās* is also well presented. The structural differences between compositions of various *gharānās* are ably described. *Kāydā* is certainly the most important composition in respect of inner design and quality. It also prepares the hands for the compositions that follow.

The book comes with a cassette carrying recorded illustrations. My comments on these follow:

Example 1 : This is a very popular *kāydā* of the Delhi *ghārānā*. The playing is correct.

Example 2 : I fail to find any specific difference between examples 1 and 2—the Delhi *kāydā* in Lucknow style—except in range and repetition of each line twice, thus effecting a change in *khuli-band.*

Example 3 : There is another popular Delhi *kāydā* notated as under:

Dhatra	*kadhi*	*tita*	*ghina*
Dhati	*ghina*	*tina*	*kina*
Tatra	*kati*	*tita*	*ghina*
Dhati	*ghina*	*dhina*	*gina*

The recorded piece is almost similar to the above Delhi *kāydā*, except that instead of the *bol traka, tita* has been put and each phrase has been repeated twice, thus increasing the range and bringing about a change in *khuli-band.*

Examples 4, 5 & 6 : These have been played correctly.

Example 7 : This has been notated and recited as *dhagena dhage tita* but played instead as *dhagena dhage dhin,* which is confusing.

Examples 8—18 : These have been executed perfectly.

Example 19 : The *mukhra* has been notated in the book, but not illustrated in the cassette.

Example 20 : This has not been played as notated in the book.

Examples 21—27 : These have been executed properly.

Example 28 : This *gat* is just a very popular Pakhāwaj *gat.*

Examples 29—38 : These are properly executed.

Example 39 : This *paran* is also a confirmed Pakhāwaj paran which has been adopted by many Kathaks.

Example 40 : This is perfect.

The two short solos by Ilmas Hussain Khan and his father Khalifa Afaq Hussain accord with their known standards.

The merits of the book are manifold. On the whole, the work makes very pleasant reading. The treatment is all along competent. The richness and volume of information collected and compiled by the author is impressive.

I am sure the author is himself a Tablā player of no mean merit; and there is no doubt that he understands the Lucknow style of Tablā-playing.

I am sure the book will be of great help and value to young learners, teachers, and performers alike. The author deserves our congratulations for producing such a comprehensive work on the Lucknow *gharānā* of Tablā.

SUDHIR KUMAR SAXENA

Ranga-Antaranga

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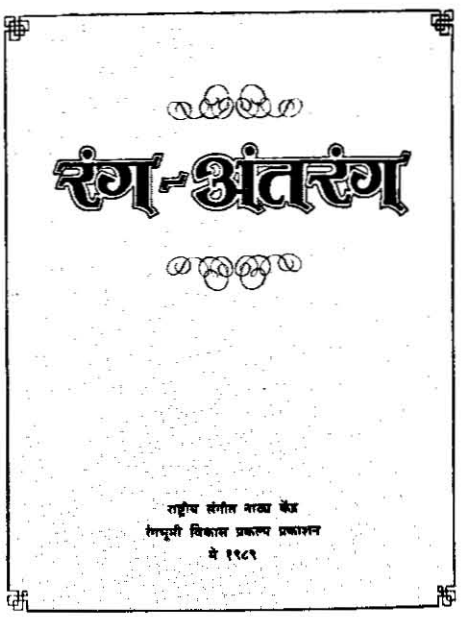
National Centre for
the Performing Arts,
Bombay
Number 1 May 1989
112 Pages, unpriced



NCPA established the Theatre Development Centre in 1986 with a two-year initial grant from the Ford Foundation to carry out research, archiving, documentation, and training in theatre with Ashok D. Ranade (Assistant Director at NCPA) as the Project Coordinator. TDC has been bringing out an occasional, modestly called *Facts & News* (beginning with No. 1 May 1987). Since NCPA is located in Bombay, naturally the Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, and English theatre in and around Bombay has received greater attention. Its latest issue, No. 13 March 1989, is a review of the first three years of the TDC project.

At this point it was felt that it would be worthwhile making this material available in Indian languages too. *Ranga-Antaranga* No. 1, in Marathi, represents the first such venture. Basically, it is a Marathi version of selections and abstracts from *Facts & News* Nos. 1—13 which were deemed to be of particular relevance to the Marathi-speaking theatre-lover. It is not a priced publication, it is sent to accredited theatre groups and is also obtainable on a request accompanied by Rs 15 by way of postal expenses.

Apart from P.L. Deshpande's introductory essay (he is the Honorary Director of NCPA), the editorials of Dr Ranade in *Facts & News* Nos. 2-13, and a review of the TDC activity (1986-89), the present issue includes interviews of Marathi theatre persons focussed on the production of eight Marathi plays which have acquired prominence in recent years, interviews of six backstage workers ranging from Deryck Jeffereis, the light and set designer, to Hiralal Jain, factotum and theatre manager, brief reports of three TDC workshops (voice, set and light design, costume and make-up), and reports and responses focussed on two TDC workshop productions of Marathi plays. Some of the material is translation from the English original and the rest is the Marathi original whose English translation has appeared in *Facts & News*. Like its prototype, *Ranga-Antaranga* is true to the dual mission of TDC—research and training.

Contemporary mainstream Marathi theatre has four levels— commercial, professional, intermediate or parallel, and experimental. In addition we need to recognize the (true) folk theatre, the commercialized folk theatre, and children's theatre. The volume gives us interesting and often tantalizing glimpses of most of these varieties. One hopes that future issues of this serial publication will gradually build up a fuller mosaic out of these glimpses.

The training division of TDC appears to be aiming at two related but distinct programmes to inject professionalism in the professional theatre and to strengthen the experimentalist component in the intermediate

theatre. Both these programmes are laudably oriented towards theatre development. The Marathi version is therefore especially welcome in that it will bring the research and training material to a larger cross-section of Marathi theatre people to whom the English-language material would not have been accessible.

I shall point out some of the lacunae in this volume which are probably traceable to the lacunae in the TDC programme itself. I am keenly aware that limitations of funds and personnel, and the 'casualism' of the Marathi theatre world may be partly responsible for these lacunae. Indeed what follow are more by way of suggestions for future planning than criticism of the excellent work of TDC for which one must be grateful. Indeed TDC is doing precisely what Sangeet Natak Akademi should be doing much more of. (Is anybody listening?)

The first gap is insufficient attention to the Indian theatre tradition (true, there is an all too brief piece by Ranade on how *not* to draw upon Bharata's *Natyashastra*). The second gap is insufficient attention to a comparative view of various regional theatre traditions in India (true, there is a sampler of the archival material on lighting in various folk traditions in India). The third gap is insufficient attention to the nascent pan-Indian theatre (true, there are glimpses of Hindi renditions of Marathi theatre pieces). The fourth gap is insufficient professionalism in the archiving and documenting activity of TDC—given the casualist ambience it will be dangerous to depend wholly on books and periodicals published in the past and on orally administered questionnaires and form-filling. This has to be supplemented by spot checks and field work. Otherwise factual errors are most likely to creep in. Mere official thoroughness is not enough. Warmly informal contacts are necessary. Finally, brief editorials on various production aspects or lectures from visiting theatre veterans at the workshop are not enough. Regular manuals of the kind available in English are badly needed in Marathi and other Indian languages.

As the cynical Hobbes once said, gratitude is the lively expectation of future favours!

ASHOK R. KELKAR

The Living Music of Rajasthan

Vijay Verma

A Census of India Monograph
published by
The Controller of Publications
Delhi
86 pages, Rs 225

Most books on Indian music merely talk about music in the abstract. The real referent is always missing. Vijay Verma writes with his ear on the object. There is a long-playing record which is part of this book and contains 14 valuable items. They crystallize in miniature all that is rich and

varied in the folk music of Rajasthan. This book provides an interesting practical criticism of these exhilarating folk songs.

The author has one more objective in writing this book. He is interested not only in music but also "the poetry, the performer, the audience, the occasion and the context". Each song is written not only in Devnagari but also the Roman alphabet. The semantic content of every song is carefully analyzed. Side by side, there is notation not only in Bhatkhande style but also staff notation in the style of Western music.

The author is genuinely interested in the performer. He met all the artistes personally and studied their caste and cultural background. For instance, he met two poor artistes, Chuno and Panchuri, who sang the ballad of Pabuji brilliantly. The destitute singers had neither regular audience nor steady income. It would be a sad day for folk music if Chuno ends up as a labourer in a mill while Panchuri does household chores in a city slum.

The author provides the context for each text. This is illustrated by brilliant sketches which bring the entire scene alive before the mind's eye. In this collection, there are two songs associated with marriage ceremony. One of these songs, rendered by Ramzan, is in *raga* Soob which is used only in folk music, though it has obvious affinity with the well known classical *raga* Kalingra.

The song associated with childbirth is rendered by the celebrated Siddique Manganiar, a master as much of melody as of rhythm. His own accompaniment on the Khartal, which has two wooden frames provided with disc jinglers, is remarkable for its artistry and virtuosity.

In this record, pure folk music is sung in high-pitched and sonorous voice by a young lad named Isra in the thick forests of Alwar. He gets brilliant accompaniment on the pastoral flute from his mentor, Hurmat. This song, set in *raga* Pahadi, has all the idyllic charm of Theocritus and the shepherds of the Kulu valley.

The best piece in this collection is a devotional song by Sohoni Devi who accompanies herself on Chautara. She has not only a mellifluous voice but also authentic feeling and moving simplicity. On the other hand, Gauri Devi excels in classical ornaments like *meend* and *murki* in her rendering of Mand, which has been the outstanding contribution of Rajasthan to the classical music of India.

Verma has given fine analyses of the various styles of singing communities like the Langas, Manganiars, Jogis, Nayaks, Kalbelias and Dholis. Obviously, he thinks highly of the Dholis because they get four items on the disc. He shows great interest in Kalbelias—the snake-charmers of Rajasthan. He feels sorry that their traditional way of life is fast disappearing. Yet a Kalbelia named Malnath sings a popular song called *Panihari*, for which every Rajasthani has endless fascination. This song is set in Shuddha Mand and Asa Mand—two popular variations on the main *raga*. The song is sung in the desert regions of Rajasthan and is associated with the chore of fetching water from a distant lake.

In the days of pop and disco, folk music is fast losing its authenticity. In many recitals, the harmonium—that bastard of Indo-European culture—replaces the Ravanhatta, which has all the graces of the Sarangi and violin. It is a pity that we treat folk music as a fossilized museum piece instead of treating it as a living art which pulsates with its own vitality. Verma rightly points out that the music of Rajasthan will survive only if we become its patrons.

CHETAN KARNANI