

BOOK REVIEWS

Classical Musical Instruments

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Musical instruments have a special place in every culture. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi aptly says, "... a musical instrument offers a special kind of material memory, in its dual capacity of a physical body and its embodied acoustic identity. As a cultural product and also a tool to articulate cultural meaning through repeated sound, an instrument becomes a privileged site for retaining cultural memory." (Qureshi, 1997, 4)

In India, the comprehensive term *sangeet* has been used to refer to the performing arts of vocal music, instrumental music, and dance. The very definition of *sangeet*—"Geetam vadyam tatha nrityam trayam sangeetam uchyate"—implies the interdependence of these arts, and accepts that both voice and instruments cooperate in perfecting the sound of music. In practice, however, there is a definite hierarchy. Vocal music is accorded a higher status because the voice is god-given and not a creation of man. Even the word '*vadya*' (musical instrument) really means 'that which speaks', or assumes a vocal quality—*vadati iti vadya*. In the Sanskrit tradition the metaphor of the Veena, a stringed instrument, is used for the human body, while the Sufi tradition uses the metaphor of the flute.

Instruments of all kinds can be traced back to the Indian subcontinent. But for various reasons, including the indifference of practitioners themselves, there seems to be a lack of awareness about musical instruments in this country. The media have done much harm by misrepresenting instruments in print and on screen. Even museums have done little to preserve and document this valuable part of our cultural heritage. It is therefore heartening to come across a book, such as the one under



review, which provides even rudimentary information about a whole range of Indian instruments.

The book is divided into five chapters, the first three dealing with three classes of instruments—percussion, wind, and string. Instruments of Western origin are described in the fourth chapter, the fifth being devoted to electronic instruments. The information provided in the last two chapters makes this book really special and up to date. All the five chapters delineate the history and evolution of the instruments dealt with. A good deal of attention is paid throughout to structural and manufacturing details, as well as the basic techniques of sound production. Detailed sketches of instruments accompany the descriptions. Since this book is aimed at anyone who would like to know about Indian music and musical instruments, it would have been even more helpful if sketches illustrating the correct postures for holding the instruments had been added. That would be one way of educating our dreadfully ignorant audiences who fail to distinguish between a Sitar, Sarod, and Tanpura!

While it is true that the book covers a whole range of Indian instruments and is supposedly based on first-hand information—interviews with artists, instrument-makers, connoisseurs of music, music critics—I see no need for the publisher to make the lofty claim (in the blurb) that "a book such as this, covering the whole gamut of Indian musical instruments, is hitherto unheard of". As is only to be expected, various previous works have been referred to and quoted in the book. To claim that the book is the first of its kind is thus uncharitable to scholars like Kurt Sachs, B. C. Deva, and others cited here.

Bharata's four-fold classification of instruments—*tata* (with strings), *ghana* (solid), *sushira* (wind-filled) and *avanaddha* (membrane-covered)—is based on the sound-

producing agency in each instrument. There is one more class that is sometimes mentioned, *vitata*, which includes stringed instruments which are covered with membrane. Our contemporary musical practice is fairly well accounted for in this classification. However, as observed by Dr Kasliwal, some instruments fall outside this typology, mainly instruments created in recent times. Such instruments can perhaps be classified by identifying the action producing the sound, i.e., plucking, blowing, bowing, or striking.

Right from the first chapter, a great deal of emphasis has been laid on the history of instruments. In the introduction to each chapter, there is a painstaking effort to trace the history of the instruments dealt with. This is no doubt informative, but some of the information is needlessly repeated while describing the individual instruments. Some statements should have been substantiated with appropriate references. One also wonders why the practice of using italics (or initial capitals) for non-English words has been done away with. A word such as 'been' (Rudraveena) can be thoroughly misunderstood in the absence of any indication of its non-English origin.

As stated in the first chapter, loaded membranes are indeed a contribution of India to the world of percussion instruments. Historical details of this practice as well as its scientific analysis by Sir C.V. Raman are presented very well by the author. (It may not be out of place here to advise those readers who are interested in knowing more about this subject to refer to the further work in this area carried out by scientists at the Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata.)

In all, ten instruments are presented in the first chapter. These are the Mridang, Pakhavaj, Mridangam, Tabla, Dukkad, Khol, Ghatam, Taval, Khanjeera and Moorchang. The last instrument, not being a membranophone, seems to be the odd one in this group. Is this an attempt to categorize instruments on the basis of function? Or is it because all of these are *tala-vadyas* (rhythm instruments)?

Instruments such as the Mridang/Mridangam and Pakhavaj have a very long history. While the present study traces the Mridang to Bharata's period, the instrument actually dates back to the great epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as to the Buddhist texts, which refer to it as Muing (Ranade, 1990, 113). If the Mridang is indeed the archetype of the South Indian Mridangam and the North Indian Pakhavaj, and is extinct today, what is the point of discussing it under a separate heading?

Nonetheless, the similarities and differences between the Pakhavaj and Mridangam are brought out in a succinct manner. The information about the Pakhavaj in temples, as well as the details of its manufacture, are indeed valuable.

The etymology of the word 'tabl', and the origin, history, as well as stylistic evolution of the Tabla, seem to have received more attention here as compared to other aspects of Tabla music, such as the different styles of Tabla-playing or the repertoire of solo Tabla performance. While comparing the performance techniques of the Tabla with those of the Pakhavaj, the author states:

The tabla is an instrument of fingers, whereas pakhavaj is an instrument of open hand (thapi). Therefore the rhythmic patterns, which can be played on tabla with unimaginable speed, are impossible to produce in pakhavaj. Moreover the positioning of hands on the tabla is more natural than on pakhavaj. A variety of tonal effects can be obtained by varying the manner of striking as well as by striking different parts of both the heads of the tabla.

There is actually no anatomical or physiological basis to the author's conjecture that the positioning of the hands on the Tabla is more "natural" than on the Pakhavaj. What accounts for the difference between Pakhavaj and Tabla music is that the Pakhavaj has been associated with the Dhrupad tradition, while the Tabla evolved in connection with Khayal. The aesthetic demands of Dhrupad and Khayal are

distinct from each other; accordingly, the stylistic techniques of the accompanying instruments have shaped up differently.

The information on instruments such as the Khol, Dukkad, Taval, Khanjeera, Moorchang and Ghatam is useful, especially the last three instruments, which are little known to North Indian readers. It is indeed intriguing that the Taval and Dukkad, which are structurally so different, accompany two very similar wind instruments, the Nagaswaram and Shehnai respectively. However, the logic offered for not using the Tabla as an accompaniment for Shehnai seems a little speculative.

Wind instruments are discussed in the second chapter. This is a relatively smaller section dealing with only five instruments. Like percussion instruments, wind instruments also have a long history in India. During the Vedic period the prototype of the Bansuri, known as Tunava or Nadi, was employed in Sama-gana, the earliest known musico-religious recitation in India (Ranade, 1990, 99). The Bansuri may perhaps be the only instrument encountered in all categories of music—primitive, folk, art, popular, and devotional. As observed in the introduction to this chapter, several treatises such as the *Natyashastra*, the *Naradiya Shiksha*, the *Sangeetaratnakara*, the *Sangeetaparijata*, etc., discuss instruments of this class; their tones, playing techniques, manufacture and usage are dealt with in detail. Although closed at one end like the (Western) flute, the special timbre of the present-day Bansuri can be attributed to the harmonics that are produced on account of the material used—bamboo—as well as the blowing technique.

It is surmised in this book that, except for the Veena and Rabab, all other instruments were relegated to the background when art music in North India passed into the hands of Tansen's descendants. Thus the Bansuri too lay dormant for about two hundred years, and only at the beginning of the twentieth century were efforts made for its revival. The author thus seems to suggest, quite reasonably, that the Hindustani flute has evolved from the Bansuri, and is no

kin of the Western flute. We are also aware that maestros like Pandit Pannalal Ghosh and Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia have preferred to identify their instrument as Bansuri and not flute, perhaps because of the non-Indian connotations of 'flute'. Against this background, the portions on Indian flutes in this book present a terminological problem, because here 'flute' and 'Bansuri' are used interchangeably. This can be confusing for the reader. Are these names indeed interchangeable?

Despite this mix-up of names, the revival of the present-day horizontal Bansuri and the remarkable contribution of Pandit Pannalal Ghosh in popularizing it as a solo concert instrument have been well documented in this chapter. It is seldom that we come across such good documentation, as given here, pertaining to physical modification of an instrument to facilitate the production of a certain kind of music. The historical data on the little-known *naubat* ensemble is equally important. The transformation of the Shehnai from a brazen pipe of the outdoor *naubat* ensemble to a full-fledged solo concert instrument in the hands of Ustad Bismillah Khan of Banaras is also noteworthy. The stylistic evolution as well as the corresponding physical development of both the Bansuri and Shehnai are landmarks in the history of musical instruments in India during the twentieth century.

In the section dealing with the Nagaswaram, citing the *Madras University Tamil Lexicon*, it has been stated that colloquially the instrument today is also called 'Nadaswaram'. Further, it is alleged that "[t]his colloquialism is of recent origin and is clearly a corruption wilfully introduced". Such a statement needs to be properly discussed and supported with relevant information.

The next chapter is the largest one, dealing with sixteen string instruments. Rightly so, because at any given point in musical history, chordophones have probably outnumbered instruments of every other category. The place of chordophones is unique in Indian musicology, especially their role in explaining the idea

of *shruti* in the ancient period. During the medieval period, too, efforts were made to determine the positions of the twelve tones on the basis of string divisions.

The discussion of the basics of the Hornbostel-Sachs classification here will be useful to students of music. The three main peculiarities of Indian string instruments have been identified by Pandit Lalmani Misra. These features reflect the nature of our music. To meet the requirements of a melodic music (as against harmonic music), features such as the wider bridge, a raised fret-level, and drone strings became necessary.

As observed by B. C. Deva, the string instruments in ancient India were mainly harps and lyres. Placing frets on string instruments was therefore a major development in Indian organology. But the history of this development is not known with any degree of precision. Thus it becomes difficult to accept the author's statement in this regard:

Scholars are unanimous that till the sixth century the string instruments that we get were not fretted. The writer of Brihaddeshi and the exponent of the chitra veena (chaitric), Matanga Muni is credited with the introduction of frets in the veena.

A statement like this definitely needs to be backed up with appropriate references and a discussion.

B. C. Deva, as quoted here, himself admits, "The historical study of the south Indian veena (very often called the Saraswati veena) of today, is even more perplexing. For, there is no intermediate link between the primitive lutes and the modern veena." As against this, the author claims, again without any reference: "In fact, the kinnari veena was changed and modified into rudra veena in the north and in the south, it was modified to acquire a new appearance as Tanjuri veena."

Despite the flawed historical account of the North Indian and South Indian Veenas, the line drawings of the two instruments and the information about some well-known Veena-players

is both useful and instructive. It is also encouraging to know about new experiments in making Veenas using non-conventional materials and methods.

Unlike earlier times, today a Veena- or Sitar-player is expected to perform before large audiences. These instruments have a delicate sound. They need amplification in order to be audible in such large gatherings, especially where subtle aspects of musicianship are involved. In this context, the author cites the experience of the Veena maestro S. Balachander and advocates the use of the contact microphone. However, a more convincing case for this practice needs to be built up than is presented by the author. Such a conclusion as this—"... the contact mike has helped overcome this apparent inadequacy"—must be supported by sufficient evidence.

The following observation about the origin of the Surbahar is interesting: "... whoever the inventor may be, the important thing is to know that it was by the beenkar gharana that an instrument like surbahar was invented, which later paved the way for the development of the modern sitar". However, a good deal of discussion is needed before concluding that the Surbahar is not as complex an instrument as the Been.

Much attention has been paid in this chapter to the origin and history of the Sitar. It is indeed surprising that the origin of instruments such as the Sitar, Sarod, Tabla, etc., which are not more than three hundred years old, is shrouded in mystery; hence the subject continues to attract the attention of scholars. In this context, it needs to be noted that even though the Muslim invasions started some time in the eighth century, there is definite evidence to suggest interaction with the outside world, especially Persia, much before this time. The presence of sympathetic strings in some of our string instruments is indeed a unique feature, not found in similar instruments elsewhere in the world. When tuned to the notes to be played on the main string, these strings resonate even without plucking, resulting in a rich and rounded sound.

Although instruments such as the Rabab, Sursingar, Esraj, etc., have gone out of vogue, and instruments like the Sarangi, Vichitra Veena, Gottuvadyam, etc., are becoming rare, it is important to discuss them in the interest of documentation. In this regard, the effort made in this work should be appreciated. There seems to be a discrepancy in the line drawing and description of the Sursingar. In the description it is mentioned that Jaffar Khan modified the Rabab by replacing the skin covering the resonator with a wooden plate (among other changes), and created the Sursingar. The line drawing, on the other hand, shows "*chamara*" (hide) covering the resonator of the latter instrument.

Despite a good discussion about the structural and stylistic similarities as well as differences between the Esraj and Dilruba, there doesn't seem to be enough justification to consider them as different instruments. Perhaps they may be regional variants of the same instrument. The Santoor, a recently introduced but popular instrument in our art music, has been discussed adequately. Even an ancillary instrument like the Swaramandal has been given its due.

The historical as well as functional and acoustic aspects of the Tanpura are well presented. It is to be noted that in comparison with string instruments of other cultures, Indian instruments such as the Tanpura and Sitar have a better harmonic output on account of a special curvature of the bridge, resulting in a superior quality of sound. However, it remains to be added that the sound quality is also affected by the positioning of the instrument and the manner as well as the point at which the strings are plucked. As pointed out in this work, the ongoing efforts to make smaller, portable Tanpuras need to be encouraged by musicians.

A detailed account of Western instruments which have become a part of mainstream Hindustani music is presented in the fourth chapter. Strange as it may seem, music and musical instruments have often travelled with traders, missionaries, and even armies! It is true that interactions between diverse cultures bring

about exchanges of musical ideas, resulting in the revitalization of cultures. From a historical perspective, it is necessary to take stock of the current scenario and document the changes that have occurred within our traditional musical milieu. In this respect, the information presented in this chapter is indeed valuable.

Instruments like the harmonium and violin have been assimilated in the North and South Indian musical traditions respectively. So much so, that within a span of about a hundred and twenty-five years, they have become an integral part of our art music ensemble. On the other hand, an instrument like the clarinet has had its day in Indian folk and popular music. However, it hasn't been able to establish itself in art music despite the patronage of All India Radio. Again, the saxophone and guitar have been adapted and modified by individual musicians to suit the requirements of Indian music. This is certainly creditable, though only time will tell whether these instruments will survive the musicians who have modified them and retain their new-found identity in Indian music.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, electronics has penetrated every field of human endeavour. However, it is only in the last two decades of the century that we have been able to feel its impact in Indian music. The instruments discussed in the final chapter of this book have gained a place in our music not only because they are useful for *riaz* or exercise, but also in public performance; this is especially true of instruments providing the drone. Despite initial apprehensions and misgivings, musicians seem to have accepted instruments like the Surpeti or Talometer. Technology can certainly be harnessed to further the cause of music. However, for this purpose, it is imperative to undertake fundamental research. Unless and until we acquire a basic understanding of the acoustical character of our music and musical instruments, we cannot hope to use technology to our advantage. And if we can't control technology, it will control and rule over us!

Finally, a word about the title of this book. 'Classical Musical Instruments' doesn't really

convey the nature of its contents. The book deals with musical instruments that are currently in use in art music in India. In the West, the word 'classical' is associated with a certain period in musical history and hence the title can be misinterpreted.

The bibliography and index are well organized. However, some typographical errors, especially in the names of musicians, seem to mar the otherwise neat and aesthetic presentation and layout of the book. Though the book excels in terms of data collected on the subject, it is lacking in methodical presentation of references as well as analytical interpretation to arrive at

logical conclusions. Despite these few limitations, this moderately priced volume is certainly a valuable addition to the existing literature on Indian musical instruments.

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The Musical Heritage of India

M.R. Gautam

Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 2001

xiii + 209 pages; Rs 525

The author of the book under review, Professor Madurai Ramaswamy Gautam, is truly a personage; and I doubt if anyone in the country could be said to excel him in respect of the variety of ways in which he has distinguished himself in the world of Hindustani music. He is a vocalist of all-India stature; he has served some leading music institutions of the country as an able teacher and administrator, besides taking part in numerous seminars of national and international importance; and he is the author of another book of note, *Evolution of Rāga and Tāla in Indian Music* (1993). However, these are not the only reasons why I regard him and his contribution to music highly. He has had the privilege of learning music from some of the greatest Khayal and Dhrupad singers of the country, and he acknowledges his indebtedness to the maestros with characteristic openness. Above all, in addition to—or because of—possessing a very rich repertoire of authentic compositions, he has a genuine feel for the structural and aesthetic values of Hindustani



music which are today quite often ignored for the sake of sheer showmanship.

The quality of the book under review therefore does not surprise me. Indeed, very few defects can be said to disfigure it. But I think it necessary to list them, so that they may

be removed before the work runs into a third edition, which is by no means unlikely. The present edition, which claims to be not only enlarged but revised, has come out this year (2001). So it is just not correct to say that Pandit Dilip Chandra Veda is "still in good health" (146), and that Ustad Aminuddin Dagar is "still doing well" at Calcutta (157); for both passed away well before the dawn of this year. Again, "chizā" (61), "sensitive" (82), and "there are nine *rasa*" (88) are some of the printing errors that do not go well with the work's overall excellence. Further, there is at least one observation in the book which calls for a supplement of critical thinking. Here, I have the following in mind:

Sanskrit poetics had a highly developed concept of beauty, and words like *saundarya*, *lavanya*, and *ramaniyata* occur frequently.

The very definition of beauty in Sanskrit poetics would indicate how deeply Indian aestheticians had explored the subject of beauty. [80]

The definition referred to above is given only as a footnote on the relevant page. It runs thus: "That is beauty which appears anew every moment." Now, the word 'anew' means: (a) once more, again; (b) in a different way. If we choose to go by 'a', we will commit ourselves to the view that beauty is the quality of appearing *again and again*—every moment. On the other hand, the second meaning would require us to believe that the quality in question consists in appearing *differently*—every moment. In both cases, however, the quality must have an abiding locus; otherwise, how would it appear repeatedly *or* differently—from moment to moment? Now, to be sure, there are cases where the locus of beauty is abiding. Quite a few representations of goddess Saraswati in our traditional sculpture may be cited as obvious instances. A more familiar illustration of the point is the Taj Mahal. But, on the other hand, there is no dearth of objects that are very often beautiful, but yet quite shortlived. By the side of a lake or river, one may be struck by the beauty of "an untumultuous fringe of silver foam" (Keats), or of a rainbow in the sky which may bewitch us like "a portal of grace across the heavens" (Kierkegaard). But neither of these is stable enough to reveal its beauty repeatedly *or* differently. I do not, however, wish to assert that the definition in question is wrong. I am only wondering how it could be true. It does not enlighten anyone if our traditional definitions of art, beauty, or aesthetic experience are merely cited, or even simply explained semantically. They have to be tested against the actual forms they relate to—without any presumption of finality.

But, I hasten to add, the author's own writing on vocal music is by no means unguarded. Thus, where he speaks of raga, he is careful to suggest that its form is only "apparently circumscribed" (19, my italics). Indeed, an important excellence that makes a classical vocalist (of India) great,

and not merely popular, is his ability to bring out the aesthetic potential of a raga maximally. This is, to my mind, perhaps the most important factor that lends added credence to the praise that the author lavishes on Ustad Faiyaz Khan as a vocalist "of surpassing distinction".

However, perhaps because of his enormous liking for vocal music, the author has been a bit too unkind to our instrumental music of today. I say so in view of the following:

[In respect of the technique of instrumental music.] Bharata Muni mentions *dhatu*, *vrtti*... All this is a far cry from the mechanical, soulless... gimmickry that pass for vīna or sitar playing today. [9]

This is, in my view, a bit too sweeping a remark, and it is certainly not true of the art of the late Ustad Zia Moinuddin Dagar (Veena) or Pandit Nikhil Chakrabarty (Sitar), whose memory is still cherished by those who have heard them. Nor is it relevant to the playing of Buddhadev Das Gupta (Sarod) or Brij Bhushan Kabra (guitar), both of whom I have personally heard on the occasion of Vishnu Digambar Jayanti in Delhi in recent years.

I agree that for any of the three instruments I have just adverted to, it is difficult to match the virtually seamless structural flow of a properly presented *sthai-antara* interplay. As I speak thus, I have in mind not only the author's due emphasis on the surpassing value of *bandish* (56), but his own singing. But, at the same time, I cannot but admit that the best of *sthai* singing cannot produce the starry sparkle of a Vilayat Khan *drut gat*. I do not at all wish to suggest that, speaking generally, instrumental music has an edge over vocal music, which I personally consider to be of great value. My purpose is only to protest against a sweeping undervaluation of contemporary instrumental music. I may add that the words "mechanical, soulless... gim-mickry" apply at least as much to the hectic *layakari* which I have seen disfiguring the singing of some of the best-known Dhrupad artists today, as to the general tendency of Sitar- and Sarod- players to confuse

atidrut playing with sheer pace without any vestige of form.

All these, however, are but minor irritants, and they do not really bedim the overwhelming value of the book. Indeed, I think its author is guilty of a gross understatement where he says, in his preface to the first edition, that "this is a serious book". Serious it undoubtedly is. The very opening chapter, a substantial one, is devoted to the contribution of Vedic music to the music of India. The one that follows discusses the two best-known basics of our music, raga and tala. The ninth chapter is a delightfully comprehensive treatment of the *gharanas* of Hindustani music, not excluding such not very well-known ones as the Fatehpur Sikri and Atrauli *gharanas*. What is more, the fourth chapter, devoted to the Khayal as the principal classical form in Hindustani music, provides a truly educative account of the different kinds of *tans*. But, and this is what I wish to emphasize, the book is very *interesting* too. I say so not only because the book contains more than forty black-and-white illustrations—including some rare pictures of maestros of both Hindustani and Carnatic music—but is enlivened with quite a few fascinating anecdotes, some of which have a distinctly educative aspect as well. Additional interest is provided to the work by Chapter V, on aesthetics; Chapter VII, which is a short but comparative study of the Hindustani and Carnatic music systems; Chapter VIII, which studies the impact of Western music on our film music; and Chapter X, devoted to current trends, which rightly bemoans that (a) the performance of Hindustani music has now become exhibitionistic (174); (b) "the weighty *tanis* which cannot be performed beyond a particular speed" are gone forever (177); and (c) the *sthai* and *antara* of Khayals are not clearly and completely enunciated in performances today, which is disappointing to a discerning listener. Above all, the book ends with a very fascinating chapter on M.S. Subbulakshmi. This not only does justice to a great artist and a noble personality, but serves

as an index of the author's own balanced way of looking at things, for he is by no means indifferent to what (in his view) ails Carnatic music today (24).

As a student of music myself, I have been impressed by quite a few examples, emphases, and distinctions that make the book enlightening. In this context, I may pick up the following for special mention: the distinction between *firat* and *tan* (63); a typical *firat*-type passage, duly notated, in raga Yaman (*ibid.*); the emphasis on *ragadari* *tans* (65); and the needful warning that a *tan* should never look like *riyaz ke palte* (64). Further, insightful remarks like the following abound in the book: "The advent of the *theka* and the marking of *tala* by another individual, the tabla player . . . were very significant landmarks in the evolution of Hindustani music." (114)

On the whole, I am convinced that this book deserves a place in every library, and not only in the libraries of music colleges and departments, for it is a very authentic and interesting presentation of an important aspect of our cultural heritage.

A close reading of the book impels me to suggest that Sangeet Natak Akademi would do well to invite Professor Gautam to choose some rare compositions from his vast repertoire and record them in its own studio; and I would very much like him to include in his selection the *adbhuta-rasa* compositions that he speaks of on page 91 of the book. It is extremely difficult—perhaps even in a rendering of *adbhuta-rasa* through a regulated disposition of words and beats, even if some help is taken from the accordant meaning of the text of the song; and the recording I have suggested will therefore truly be an acquisition for the Akademi.

The book is fairly well-produced—I like its binding in particular; and it is reasonably priced. I would be surprised if it does not sell very well.

S. K. SAXENA

Listening to Indian Music

Chetan Karnani

Arnold Associates, Delhi, 1999

272 pages; Rs 275

The author offers, in twenty-eight chapters spread over five sections, comments on a variety of topics—creativity in Indian music, aesthetics and music criticism, some Hindustani vocalists and their *gharanas*, Carnatic music, Hindustani instrumentalists—and two essays grouped under the title 'A Critical Analysis'. It is not clear whom the book is meant for. If it is for the uninitiated layman, much of the contents will make no sense. If it is for non-Indians, again, the assumptions made by the author about basic technical familiarity will make the chapters unintelligible. And if it is for Indians who are familiar with classical music, then many of the statements will be found contentious. Even taken as essays reflecting personal viewpoints, the chapters are full of vague generalizations, mistakes, and contradictions.

Most of the drawbacks of the book, in fact, become manifest within the first three chapters. For example, we read on page 21, "As a result of the influence of western music, we no longer believe that classical music is or should be static. No longer does any Indian musician believe that his only role is to faithfully reproduce those ragas which he has inherited." If Indian musicians had indeed believed that music should be static, we would never have moved from the Prabandha stage to that of Dhrupad, and subsequently the Khayal. Likewise, in the South, we would never have seen the evolution of the Kriti form. Exposure to Western music had nothing to do with these developments. A subsequent statement (38) adds that "Indian music is characteristic of Indian culture which is largely static." This flies in the face of comments made in the later chapters, where innovative developments introduced by musicians (new ragas, new approaches to forms, formats, and presentation—Kumar Gandharva's, for ins-



tance) have been extolled. A raga, the author says, is "any melodic system which within certain limits, everyone discovers for himself according to his temperament. One can say in a sense that Beethoven is a raga." (27) This is

hardly a statement that could enlighten a lay person (or, for that matter, a knowledgeable one). Further on, in the chapter on Ragamala paintings, the author says, "By keeping the painting in mind the artiste manages to conform to the accepted view of a raga." (49) Surely this is an exaggeration—few musicians will concede that they 'keep in mind' the pictorial depiction of a raga in order to 'conform' to its accepted form. Malhar raga may be a seasonal raga associated with the monsoons, but do artists who sing Malhar "depict these [dark clouds] by the incantation of the key word 'dhoom' ", as the author claims? Many satisfying expositions of Malhar can be recalled and cited, which do not use the word 'dhoom' at all! Take another statement, which says, "Indian music is melodic against a strictly rhythmic background." (31) What does that mean? What about elements of classical music which are rhythm-free (which Karnani himself exalts in his comments on *alap*)?

Several technical errors reduce the credibility of the comments further. For example, in Chapter 10, the author says that Bhimsen Joshi uses, "In Sudh Kalyan, madhyam and nishad in the ascent through meend", whereas these two notes are specifically forbidden in the ascent and their use would mean straying into Yaman raga. In the subsequent pages (150–151), both Faiyaz Khan and Vilayat Khan are mentioned as composers who used the pseudonym Pran Piya. Is this correct?

In the chapter on Indian and Western music, there is the statement: "... a raga is not a raga unless it has temporal sanctity and old asso-

ciations." (35) In a subsequent chapter, however, there is appreciation, not condemnation, of new and novel 'spliced' ragas created by some leading performers of recent years. Ragas concocted by Kumar Gandharva, for instance, have no temporal sanctity or old associations, and yet he is praised for his "creativity".

While every author is entitled to his personal opinions and preferences, especially in the field of the arts, what the reader finds irritating is not so much the thrust of the contents as their unsatisfactory and shoddy presentation. Mallikarjun Mansur is mentioned as "Mulkerjun" in one sentence and as "MulK Arjun" in another (both on page 135), then as "Mulkarjun" on page 142, as "Mallikjun" on page 218, and as "MulK Rajun" on page 248, betraying scant respect for accuracy even in the use of the name of a leading artist who is now dead. Similarly, Gangubai Hangal becomes "Gangabai" on page 94 and "Gandubai" on page 83, while Paluskar becomes "Palkushar" (159)! And what does one make of a sentence like this: "In singing for himself he [Amir Khan] sang for galleries food."? Repetitions of sentences and paragraphs abound too, throughout, sometimes on the same page; the chapter on Amir Khan may be mentioned as one example.

Karnani also betrays a failing, common to many North Indians, of identifying Indian music with Hindustani music, and showing scant understanding of the South Indian system which is just as much a part of Indian music. While he ridicules another writer for getting the name of the composer of the *Unfinished Symphony* wrong, he himself makes similar mistakes, especially in his references to Carnatic music. Raga Simhendramadhyamam becomes 'Simhendhra' (35), while a few pages on he says, "a Karnatak concert invariably begins with an invocation to Lord Ganapati in Hamsadhvani". No, not invariably. It is only a popular choice. Many Carnatic concerts begin with a 'arnam, or with Kritis in ragas other than hamsadhvani. Another statement says, "It is surprising that even the vocal and instrumental counterparts of the same kriti remain much the

same". Why is it surprising? This is akin to a foreigner saying, 'How can you play classical music without sheet scores in front of you?', and shows a lack of understanding of the musical system dealt with.

The statement that "South Indian [*sic*] do not show undue preoccupation with vadi and samvadi" can also be contested—these notes may not be specifically and explicitly spelt out, but each raga is certainly identified as having dominant and underplayed notes among the *svaras* it takes, and these details are implicitly imparted by the teacher in the course of instruction. (For example, *gandhara* is emphasized in Sankarabharanam, while *rishabha* and *dhaivata* are not.)

Similarly, the statement that the music of the South Indian flute virtuoso T. R. Mahalingam (Mali, as he was popularly known) was "restless", while Pannalal Ghosh's music was reposeful, shows that Karnani has not cared to hear some of Mali's best presentations which are just as reposeful and soul-stirring as the music of any other flutist of the North or South. Likewise, raga Abhogi is described as "closer to Sri Ranjani" (266); actually, Abhogi is just plain Abhogi in the Carnatic system too—the raga was borrowed from the South. Chinna Moulana played Chakravakam, not "Chakam" (referred to again on page 222 as "Chakreavakram"); and Jon Higgins sang Yamunakalyani, not Yaman—there is no Yaman in Carnatic music. In addition, statements like "Innovation is a comparatively rare thing in Karnatak music" show scant understanding and familiarity with the system and its intricacies, sharing the popular misconception that Carnatic music is all about reproducing Kritis. There is far more to it than that. Why comment on a system if one doesn't know it well enough?

A large part of the blame for the drawbacks of the book go also to the publisher who has done a very shoddy job of editing and proof-reading. There is not a single page that is not full of spelling mistakes—'*shruthis*' become "shruits", 'Hamsadhvani' becomes "Handhwani", and 'Balasubramaniam' becomes

"Balasubramiam", while 'climactic' is spelt throughout as "climatic"; sentences are often left hanging and incomplete. Howlers abound: "Kumar Gandharva dispersed with all considerations of tonality. It is to his credit that all his excesses and discordance [*sic*] usually evaporate before one spirit's plastic stress"; "Ajay Chakravarty's rending of Rageshwari..."; "Musicians of the Rampur-Sahaswan gharana are impressed by their wide

vocal range". 'Vocalism' is spelt repeatedly as "volcanism", while 'Unesco' becomes "Uenescio". Composers Bartok, Dvorak and Tchaikovsky are all spelt wrongly.

To crown it all, the binding is so shabby that the spine gave way and split during the first reading. All in all, a most unsatisfactory book.

SAKUNTALA NARASIMHAN

Gadbadjhala, Khelkavya:

Ek Parichay

Ed. Ashish Ghosh, Manish Manoj
Maulana Azad Centre for Elementary
and Social Education, Delhi, 2001

90 pages; Rs 100

Whenever I have had occasion to watch a performance of *Gadbadjhala*—and that must have been half-a-dozen times in the last five years—I have always been struck by its remarkable spontaneity. Every time, unfailingly, the presentation has been vivacious, joyful, relaxed. And, best of all, seemingly untutored. No mean achievement for the director of this play for children, Ashish Ghosh.

This has perhaps been possible because Ashish does not look upon his play as a final product, or the production as a 'performance'. He is more attentive to, and interested in, the *process*—the making of a play which will *also* be performed before audiences. He draws out and presents a child's creativity and ideas, and is thus able to secure the child's participation. The artlessness of child's play, often called 'creative drama' or 'make-believe play', shines through each performance.

Gadbadjhala, now in print (a working script in Hindi), first came to life some years ago (1995) during a workshop at Bal Bhavan, Delhi. It was not conceived as a play initially. In the workshop, during voice-exploration exercises, the children were often unable to memorize the



poems given to them. But they were able to recite from memory, and spontaneously enact, the poems and rhymes they had picked up playing with their peers. Ashish could see the dramatic potential of this exercise, which led to a small dramatic presentation of some children's poems. Subsequently, during the workshops conducted in the next two years, this basic idea was developed and took fuller shape. In 1997 *Gadbadjhala* was performed in its present format—a format which is flexible, enabling full participation whenever the play is performed. The success of the play led to the publication of this book, which also contains a small sample of the children's verses collected in the course of the three workshops.

It is a slim, ninety-page volume, and includes (besides the play and the children's verses) a longish article on child literature by Ashish Ghosh, excellently translated into Hindustani by Manish Manoj. Drawing upon the writings of Rabindranath Tagore and Sukumar Sen, and poems for children by Damodar Agrawal, Devendra Kumar, Prakash Manu, Ratnaprakash Sheel, Zaheer Qureshi, Suryakumar Pandya, Ramesh Thanvi, Rameshchandra Shah, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, Nirankar Dev Sevak, and Ram Naresh Tripathi (as well as traditional sources of oral literature), Ashish in this article

makes an impassioned appeal to retrieve and recover the voices of children in folk and urban lore. He makes the point that children's rhymes and poems are sometimes purely onomatopoeic sound play, sometimes hilarious nonsense, sometimes naughty pokes, sometimes an oblique critique of the adult world, but never are they imitative of adult responses.

According to the author, Tagore was probably the first to realize the importance of children's verse. In 1884/85 he wrote that the *rasa* of the charming *chhoras* (rhymes/ditties) of childhood is not part of any of the traditional nine *rasas* of Indian aesthetics. This *rasa*, he said, is akin to the fragrance of freshly ploughed, damp, earth. This fragrance cannot be likened to sandalwood, rose, or incense, but has a primeval simplicity. The *rasa* of child literature, Tagore said, is "Bal-rasa". The author's inspiration to collect Bangla *chhoras* comes from Tagore. He also recalls that Sukumar Sen called the *chhora* "Bal-veda", and states that the seeds of primitive literature are to be found there.

Ashish Ghosh laments that there seem to be no collections of children's verses in Hindi; that writers and scholars of Hindi have never done any systematic research in this field. And he emphasizes that all the elements of theatre are integrated in children's verse. The contemporariness and capacity of children's verse to absorb new ideas is reiterated with examples.

Notwithstanding the spirit of Ashish's arguments and tentative formulations (and to a large extent sharing it), some contrary thoughts too come to mind. How do we know with any certainty that what we take to be verses *by* children are really children's creations? They may well be the work of fun-loving adults—

grandmothers, mothers, aunts, elder sisters—who have entered the child's world looking after young children. People with the talents of Nazir Akbarabadi or Amir Khusro too could well have penned childlike verses. Such verses too, *because* they are not taught in schools, have a tenacious life of their own and have become an integral part of our oral literature.

Children, especially very young children, who are still in the process of learning to speak, often experiment with sounds and words. And many of them make up 'poems' as part of their constant prattle. These rarely, perhaps never, find their way into oral literature. What gets transmitted is the verse that children pick up at play with their peers. While it is true that children are very innovative and original, there is in Ashish's essay a slight tendency to romanticize their creativity.

Gadbadjhala contains some one hundred and fifty verses, rhymes and ditties in Khari Boli, as well as in Haryanvi, Braj, Rajasthani, Maithili, and Punjabi. These are illustrated with sketches by children. It also includes excerpts from writings on children's literature by Alex Priminger, Bloomfield, Khushal Zaidi, Y.M. Sokolov, Michael Meyer, Annadashankar Ray, and, as mentioned earlier, Rabindranath Tagore and Sukumar Sen.

This slim volume is recommended for parents, teachers, poets, and anybody else who interacts with children. It is a valiant and wonderful beginning in collecting children's verses, and points to the theatrical and pedagogic possibilities of the genre. These possibilities need to be explored by those of us who truly love our children.

MOLOYASHREE HASHMI