

# TOUR NOTES

by the

Secretary

I recently undertook a tour of certain parts of India, the aim of which was, as it were, to feel the pulse of the world of art in the country, to understand the problems of musicians and dancers and to exchange views with prominent figures. I also wished to assure the artists I met, of the Akadami's interest in them and of its desire to offer them every possible help and encouragement. The particulars of my tour are given below, but in general I would like to say that I was overwhelmed with the ready responsiveness of all those whom I met, towards the Akadami. I had expected disinterested curiosity and some measure of suspicion from the monopolists of art, but I am confident that, so long as the Akadami is willing to understand other points of view, it will have every possible cooperation from all quarters.

## BARODA

Baroda was my first destination, because, beside being the home of great masters like Ustad Fiayaz Khan and Faiz Muhammad Khan, it is also the place where the first music college in India was opened, and the first music conference held. Its oriental library is well-known and houses some invaluable manuscripts. I am happy to say that the Pro-Chancellor and the Registrar of the University of Baroda were very willing to cooperate with us, and responded kindly to my proposal that the publication of these manuscripts should be undertaken. For the present, a few of them have been selected for immediate publication.

## MADRAS

Madras, in some ways the centre of the Karnatic School of Music for the urban connoisseur, was my next important stop. The progress made by this school during the last few decades is truly remarkable. In spite of the proverbial orthodoxy of this style of music I found a refreshing receptivity in its exponents to other systems of music. A number of promising young musicians born into the Karnatic style have taken to North Indian forms with effortless grace and have thereby enriched both traditions. Practitioners of the North Indian classical school are also anxious to understand the spirit of the Karnatic system and to learn something of it. I am confident

that an interflow of this kind will produce gratifying results and that both systems will be the better for it.

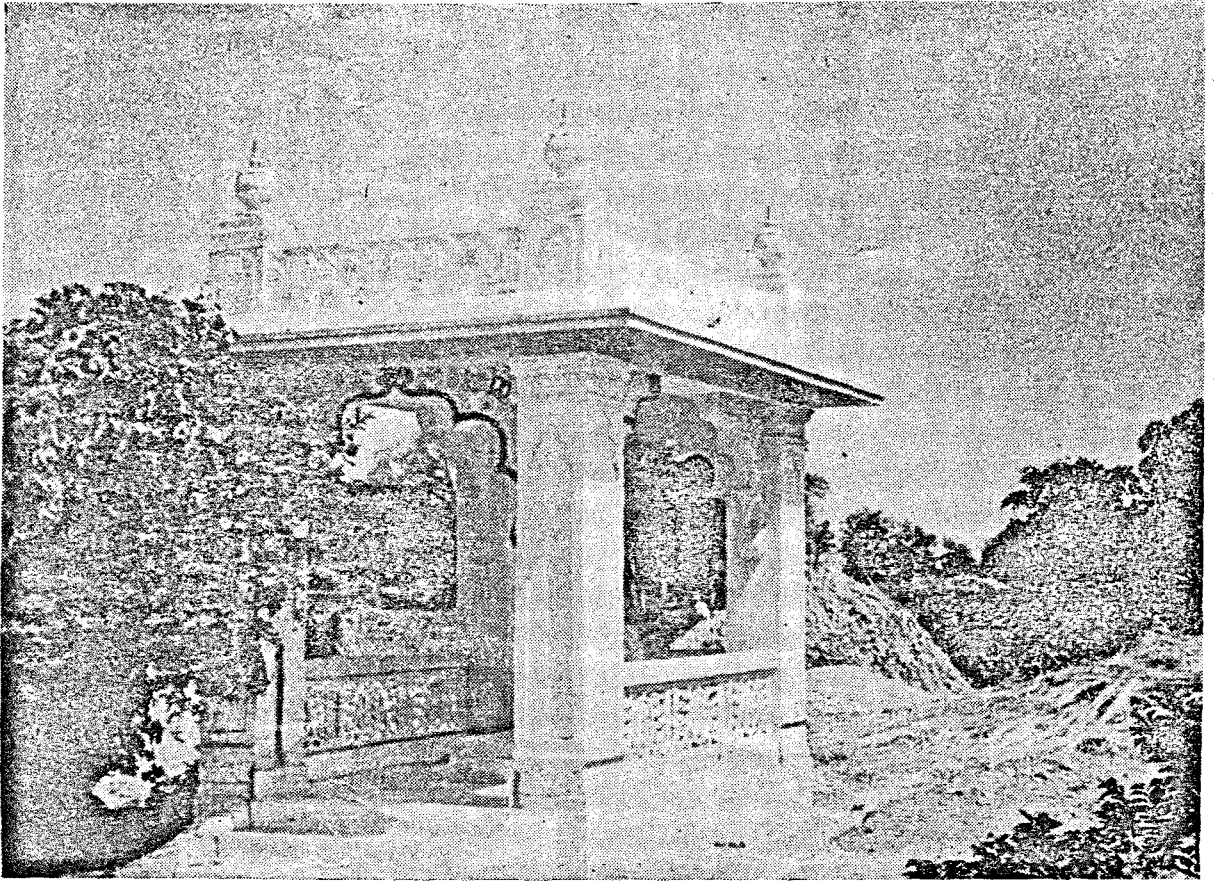
I am grateful to the Government of Madras for affording me every facility for visiting institutions of music and dance in the State. I was honoured with a public reception which was addressed by the Minister of Education and the Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akadami. I found the largest measure of goodwill for the Akadami and sympathy for its objectives.

I visited Shrimati Rukmini Arundale's institute of dance and music, Kala Kshetra, Gopinath's School of Dancing and the Madras Academy where the students have the privilege of being taught by the great Balasaraswati, whose skill and grace are almost legendary in the annals of Bharatanatyam. I would like to record here my gratitude to her for consenting to give a dance recital for the Akadami, which was a rare and unforgettable experience for me. Besides these I visited a number of other institutions and met a number of eminent artists and critics in the various fields of music, dance and drama and I was confirmed in my belief that the art traditions in the South, apart from the glorious heights they have achieved in the past, have a tremendous future in the new set-up of the country.

The Madras concert is well-known for its quality and its abundance of discriminating and eager listeners. There is no dearth of either artists or critics and I hope that Madras will soon have its own regional academy of music, dance and drama.

For the Akadami's Library, I was fortunate enough to secure recordings of Srimati Saraswati Bai, the foremost exponent of Harikatha, Sethu Ramiah, the young violihist of great distinction and promise, and some folk songs. Justice T. K. Venkataraman was kind enough to record for us a few specimens of Muthuswami Dikshitar's compositions.

Sri C. Rajagopalachari, the Chief Minister, was also kind enough to grant me an interview and discuss with me various problems of art and artists.



*Ustad Faiyaz Khan's Tomb at Baroda*

## **MYSORE AND BANGALORE**

Mysore and Bangalore have a large number of institutions of music and dancing which I had the pleasure of visiting. I also met prominent musicians like T. Chowdiah, Nilambakadambi, and the great composer, Vasudevacharya. I was gratified to learn that large groups of musicians in Mysore had heard of the Sangeet Natak Akadami and were in sympathy with its objectives. They, however, confessed to me that they had not been very optimistic about its effectiveness to do much, since it seemed to be merely a cry in the wilderness. The fact of my visit seemed to assure them that we meant to uphold their interests and had not gone to thrust something upon them or to wrest something away from them, but to make a free exchange of ideas as a preliminary to greater cooperation for a greater cause. I assured them that the Akadami was not an attempt to draw music and dancing within the sphere of dead officialdom but would ever strive to be a living reality for them. Chowdiah, the well-known violinist obliged with recording for the Akadami.

I would like to mention here that Mysore University is perhaps the only University in the country which offers a regular course in dramatics. I hope their example will be followed by other Universities,

because in this country drama certainly needs to be taken more seriously than it is. I am sure that a greater deal of dramatic talent exists among the youth of the country today, and it should be our endeavour to develop it earnestly and not let it remain to be discovered by accident, or witht for lack of proper guidance.

I visited a number of villages in the interior of Mysore with a view to collecting specimens of folk songs. I also got a chance to see some fascinating folk dances. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the village folk were interested in what message the Akadami had for them and offered their cooperation spontaneously.

I met the Chief Minister of Mysore who assured me that he would do all he could to see that Mysore's Regional Academy came into being as soon as possible. The draft constitution of the Regional Academy has already been drawn up.

## **CHIDAMBARAM**

Chidambaram, the site of the famous temple of Nataraja, was my last stop in the South. I visited the Annamalai University and was greatly impressed by the research work in various fields that is being conducted there.

It was a privilege to visit the Nataraja temple, and a rare experience to enjoy the grace and power of the 108 dancing poses for which the temple is well-known. The architectural splendour of the many halls of dancing here creates an indelible impression on the mind. It struck me that at the time of the *arti*, which in Northern India is too often a loud and unmusical medley of sounds, is here a ritual of great musical charm. The drum, the conch and the bell are tuned to sound the notes Sa, Pa, Sa as in the Tambura. The sonorous tones of Mukhaveena, a small pipe like instrument, lull the diety to sleep.

## INDORE

Indore, the home of the famous Dhrupadiya, Ustad Nasiruddin Khan, and of Imdad Khan, grand father of the Sitariya Vilayat Khan, and the cradle of a hundred great traditions, was my first stop in Madhya Bharat. Rahimuddin Khan, the brother of Nasiruddin Khan is the oldest representative of the only surviving Dhrupad School in the country. I paid homage to the great names that are no more, and could not help dwelling on the fact that Madhya Bharat was also the home of Tansen and had nurtured the famous Gwalior schools of music.

I visited the institutions of music, dance and drama in Indore. The Education Minister was kind enough to call a meeting of all the prominent artists, institutional heads and those who were interested. He introduced me to them and explained the purpose of my visit. I was grateful for the chance of giving them the message of the Akadami and was given assurances that I could count on the cooperation of artists and institutions of art in Indore.

It is hoped that the Kala Parishad in Madhya Bharat will adopt the aims and objectives of a Regional Academy and begin to function as such in the near future.

## DEWAS

In Dewas, I met Kumar Gandharva, who had burst upon the music world as a child prodigy with remarkable gifts, about fifteen years ago. He is now engaged in research work on the folk songs of Malwa. In this field, he has already accomplished a great deal and I had the benefit of his general views on the subject. I appreciate it greatly that in spite of ill health, he did some recordings for the Akadami. I also met Shyam Parmar, the earnest young research worker who has done a great deal for the revival of folk music, and shows promise of doing more.

I also met Ustad Rajab Ali, who is a Khayaliya of no mean repute. No records of his art were available till now and the Akadami is the proud owner of some recordings that he made at my request. Ustad Rajab Ali is a great stylist and is famed for the ingenuity, grace and structural beauty characteristic of his tans,

## UJJAIN

At Ujjain I visited the famous temple of Mahakal. I had an interview with Ashtavale, the eighty year old Sitariya, belonging to the famed house of Murad Khan. Even though he has stopped playing now, he honoured me as the representative of the Akadami by playing for a few minutes. He was interested to know what the Akadami intended to do, now that the States were disintegrated. I also met Shri Surya Narain Vyas, who is a scholar of Malwa folk culture and the President of the Malwa Lok parishad. I was glad to have assurances of cooperation in the Akadami's aim to preserve and encourage the folk culture of India.

## A Visit to Manipur

—that land of dances was quite exciting. Situated at India's most North-Eastern frontier it is surrounded by nine converging mountain ranges. Manipur's isolation is geographical as well as political. Its highest peak, mount Kobru is the lowest of the Himalayan ranges. Scenically Manipur is extraordinarily beautiful. Suddenly the mountains disentangle and at their feet is spread a flat plain. Between the layers of increasingly high hills, huge wisps of cloud lie as if loathe to quit the valley. Racially the Manipuri is a mixed ethnic group. The "Meitei" or Manipuri, in general, is physically well-built, small, sturdy, beautiful and healthy. There are remnants of civilisation of this mixture but the prominent religion is Vaishnavism. Manipuris are religious, and what little is known of their history is greatly coloured by religious myths and legend. Manipur is a land of dancers. It is compulsory, however, for the women to dance but optional for men. It is, therefore, a nation of amateurs.

Pandit Atombapu Sharma the great Manipuri scholar, gave me a very patient hearing and through his courtesy I met all the Gurus of Manipur—dancers, musicians (Kirtan), Pung and Pena players. I was overwhelmed by their hospitality, and the great affection they showed. It was also my privilege to visit the widow and sons of the late Shri Yumjao Singh—once Education Minister and archaeologist of the Darbar. The family but in particular his son Tomcha Singh, has kept his memory alive by running an institution of dancing—Nrityashram which is doing very good work in preserving and propagating pure Manipuri dancing. Pandit Atombapu Sharma enlightened me on the various styles and aspects of Manipuri dance and his discourse on how mythologically Manipur was connected with dancing was most fascinating.

According to Meitei people Manipur was created so that the Gods might have a place to dance. Krishna and the Gopis danced in ecstasy—the *Ras* with which they amused themselves. Shiva was very keen on seeing this dance but Krishna would not agree. He gave

in to this extent that Shiva could not stand porter at the gate and keep his back to the Ras. The promise was kept, but the memory of the ravishing music and the sound of the bells round the feet left him quite intoxicated. Parvati was very much irritated on account of this pre-occupation. So together they decided to create a Ras of their own. But where to perform it? They walked down the Himalayas till they reached Manipur. Shiva sat on mount Kobru and looked around. The valley was submerged in water. With his Tridant he made a gash in the mountain and the waters drained into Irawaddy where they still flow.

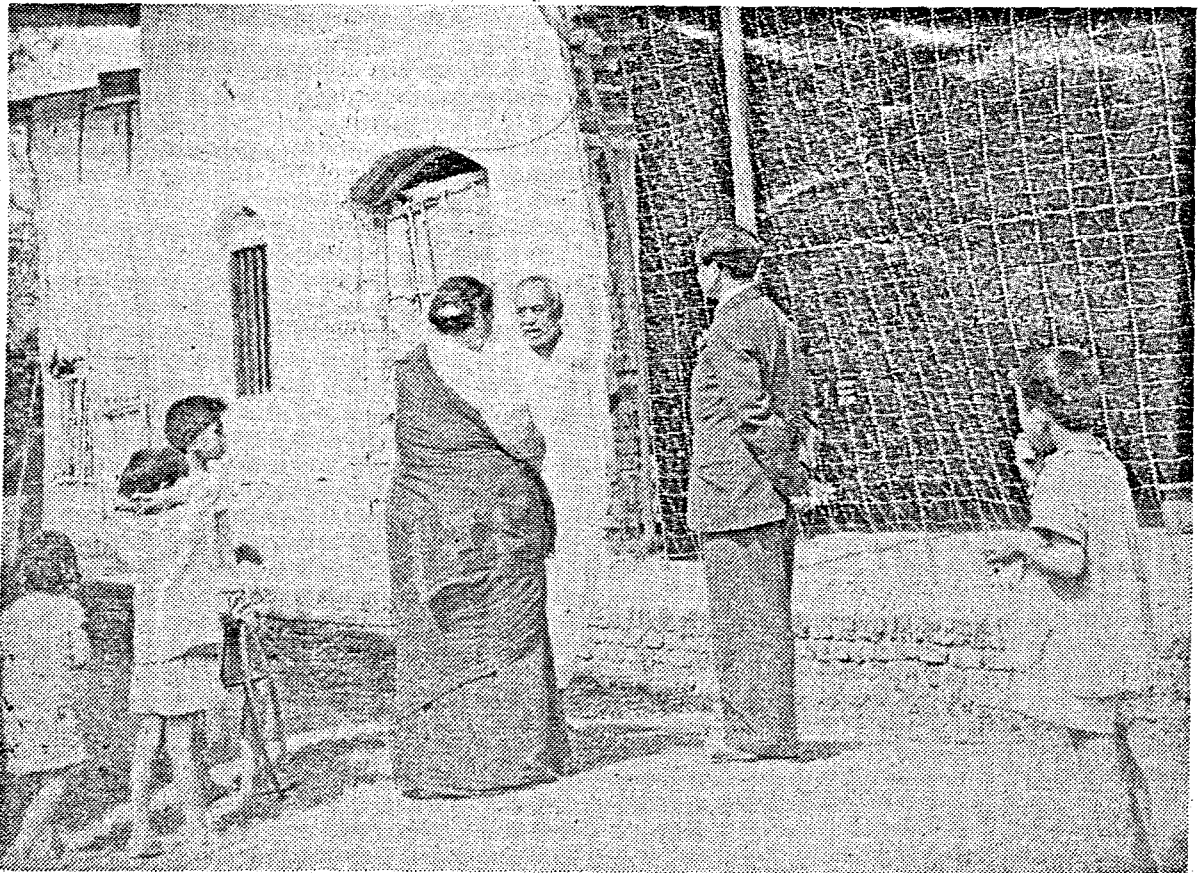
The nine celestial Apsaras were summoned and made to sit on the nine peaks of the hills that surround the valley. Pung (a musical instrument like the Mridang) and the Pena (a small stringed instrument with a bell on the neck and played with a bow) were created. The serpent god—Pakhamba kept the area lit by the radiance of his jewelled cobra like hood. At the conclusion of the dance Pakhamba was in ecstasy and the glitter of his jewel released in a spray over the entire area and so it is that the place is known as Mani (Jewel) Pur (Place) and thus it is that Ras

el Lela costumes of Manipuris are sprinkled with mica to sparkle like the original diamond.

The reason of my visiting Manipur was to discuss with the State authorities, scholars and dance Gurus the ways and means of establishing a central college of dancing at Imphal.

Manipur is likely to have its own Regional Academy soon. Till such time, however, this college will be the concern of the Sangeet Natak Akadami. The idea of having a Central College of dancing at Imphal was an old cherished dream. It has, however, been possible to give it a practical shape only by the keen interest evinced by the Prime Minister, who made funds available from the folk dance festival, for starting this college.

The great Gurus Amubi Singh and Atamba Singh will all be associated with the college and besides teaching the Lai Haroba and Ras dances, teaching of various tribal dances will form part of the curriculum. To Pandit Atombapu Sharma and late Shri Yumjao Singh's family the Akadami will ever remain grateful for their generous gesture in placing at its disposal, free of rent, their Mandaps for starting the college.



*Pandit Atombapu Sharma offering his Mandap to the Secretary for the use of Manipuri dance college. Standing to the right is Syed Ashfaq Husain*