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Cover Picture:

Guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar as Surpanakha in *Surpanakhankam*. (*Photo*: G. RAVI).

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What is *Khyal?*—A Critique of Wade's *Khyal:* Creativity Within North India's Classical Music Tradition

Mukund Lath

This book has all the trappings of an impressive production. It is published by a University with as great a tradition of scholarship as *khyal* has of creativity, a tradition with a history certainly older than that of *khyal.* The 350-odd pages that the book contains are beautifully printed with numerous impeccably drawn charts of *sargam*-s and *gharana* genealogies and well reproduced photographs of well-known musicians. Its appearance is sober but attractive, befitting the scholarly series of which it is a part. This appearance invites respect despite the fact that the banner "ethnomusicology", under which it is published, has certain unsavoury suggestions and echoes of references to a comparatively "lower" art, practised by traditional, "third-world" communities, stagnant rather than creative. One would not write about Western classical music under this banner.

I must hasten to add, however, that Bonnie C. Wade's attitude towards her subject has no ethnomusicological overtones in any pejorative sense. Quite the contrary, she has, in fact, great admiration for *khyal* as an art-form. Maybe the meaning of the term "ethnomusicology" is changing, as many students of the subject claim. But then why not do away with the word? Is not "musicology" adequate?

But no matter what the name of the series, a book from Cambridge is bound to arouse great expectations. A student will turn to the book hoping that here at last is something definitive on *khyal.* He will be disappointed. The book does not offer much more than the musically not very illuminating books we already have in Hindi and Marathi.

Wade begins with a short chapter on the history of the social context and patronage of *khyal.* The second chapter, again a short one, defines *khyal* as a musical genre. The next six longer chapters are devoted to six *khyal gharana*-s namely Gwalior, Agra, Sahaswan/Rampur, Alladiya Khan, Kirana and finally Patiala. Chapter Nine, 'On Individuality', concerns those *khyal* singers who have attained a style so individual that it cannot be boxed within any particular *gharana.* One is surprised here to miss celebrities like Kumar Gandharva and Pandit Jasraj though a

contemporary, Manik Verma, is included. Indeed, well-known creative musicians, who do not fit into the six *gharana*-s which Wade deals with, are missed out, while comparatively minor ones, if they belong to the six chosen *gharana*-s, find a place in the book. The reason is simple; Wade considers *gharana* to be the backbone of *khyal,* responsible both for its preservation and its continuing creativity. Her final chapter, entitled 'Conclusion', which contains some reflections on *gharana,* ends with the rueful note that the current shift away from the *gharana* towards the growing 'star system', in which the emphasis is entirely on individual performers who "prefer to combine aspects of several *gharana* musical styles, could disturb the delicate balance between tradition and creativity which has characterised *khyal* as a genre". This, she adds, could lead either to conservatism or too radical a change, more radical "than has taken place in North Indian music in several hundred years". Having made this sweeping, unwarranted and ignorant comment about the last few hundred years of Indian music, she tries to balance it by making an equally unthinking remark which contradicts it. "But in India", she writes, "even that has always been so".

To be charitable to her, I do not think she really means to say anything by this seemingly profound and aphoristic remark, which is the last sentence in her book. Probably she felt that as a scientist her job was only to analyse and describe, and that she was overreaching herself in passing judgements that could be taken as prescriptive. That last remark looks to me like a hasty, half-conscious attempt at withdrawing the earlier one.

Gharana, for Wade, is not only the backbone which upholds *khyal* and gives it vitality, but also the key for comprehending it in its various aspects, historical as well as formal. This is plainly unsatisfactory. Interesting though *gharana* is as a social and historical phenomenon, it is not a fruitful basis for understanding *khyal* as a musical form. The problems in Deshpande's much-discussed attempt (in *Gharandaj Gayaki*) to do so, should have warned Wade to look for other, more structure-oriented categories for discussing different ways of rendering *khyal.*

Wade herself spells out some problems and complications in trying to understand the very notion of a *gharana.* Her book begins with an effort to grapple with the concept (pp. 2-5). To explain what *gharana* means, she takes as her basis the attempt at a definition of *gharana* made by Neuman in his book *The Life of Music in North India* (1980). The term, he had admitted, was loose and ambiguous; its closest equivalent in the West, he says, is an 'intellectual circle'. The *gharana,* according to him, consists of a group of musicians who formulate, share and represent a musical style. What distinguishes a *gharana* from an intellectual circle is, in Neuman's opinion, the familial nature of the *gharana* as an institution, with a lineage of hereditary musicians. Thus a group with both a distinct style and a distinct familial pedigree is what makes a *gharana,* style being the more definitive of these two elements. Style, he says, is what binds the group together. The style, it is further stipulated, should have endured through three generations of continuous cultivation (a feature associated with *gharana* by Deshpande).

Wade realises that, vague and accommodating as this definition is, it cannot yet be applied to all the six *gharana*-s she has picked out as distinct groups worthy of that status. She discovers that it is flawed with *avyapti* (leaving groups out which are truly *gharana*-s). She thus seeks to refine the definition. A *gharana,* she says, need not consist of a single lineage of hereditary musicians, it may consist of several lineages. "A distinction", she remarks, "can be made between a lineage which is the 'founding family' of the *khyal* style and a lineage which has become successor to the tradition". She finds it necessary to make this distinction and enlarge the definition, for otherwise Gwalior—considered by some as the oldest of *gharana*-s and 'father' of others—cannot be included within the fold of the chosen six. That will be a serious *avyapti,* indeed. "In the Gwalior *gharana",* she writes, "the oldest of the *khyal gharana*-s, the lineage of hereditary musicians who were the founding family of the *khyal* style is extinct; a different family of hereditary musicians (the Pandits) who were trained into the tradition by the founding family carries on the tradition of family transmission".

But this refinement—or rather enlargement—of the definition she finds, is not enough. It must be enlarged further, made more loose. Gwalior had a lineage of the 'founding family' which may now be extinct and taken over by a very different family (the earlier family being the Muslim; the successor family Hindu Brahmin!), but there *was* such a lineage. But this stipulation has to be 'refined' away if we must recognise 'Alladiya Khan' as a separate *gharana.* For, as Wade points out, no other member of the family of musicians to which Alladiya Khan belonged, ever cultivated his *khyal* style. And yet how can we leave 'Alladiya Khan' out of the *gharana* fold? Wade makes it qualify as a *gharana* on the ground that "two of his (Alladiya's) eminent successors are a mother and a daughter". So there is a familial continuity even though the founding family had no musical lineage. This raises the question whether 'Alladiya Khan' would have qualified if the two continuous successors were not mother and daughter but mother and her distant niece, or two quite unrelated disciples in two successive generations. Thus arises the basic question whether family connections are really important for there to be a *gharana.* Wade herself states that family ties need have nothing to do with the continuation of a *gharana.* "Thus", she writes, "consideration of disciples in *gharana*-s allows for the exploration of relationships between families of hereditary musicians and musicians not related by family ties. Non-family musicians have been prominent in the cultivation of *khyal*". Ties of discipleship, she remarks, can be the same as family ties "if the teacher so chooses".

But if this is so, what happens to the definition of *gharana* we began with? It was extended to save it from serious *avyapti*-s, but now it has become so loose and large—so *ativyapta,* in other words—that it is applicable to any *guru-shishya-parampara!* Transmission from a teacher to a taught has always been central to the transmission of any knowledge, be it music or any other art or science, in India or any other country. And when the art or science transmitted is a specialised body of knowledge, then the relation between teacher and taught is often a close relationship even in the so called non-traditional societies. Wade's moves help us realise that the distinction Neuman makes between a *gharana* and an 'intellectual circle' is quite tenuous.

Another feature Wade considers necessary to mark a group as a *gharana* is that it should have persisted over three generations both as a style and a pedigree with a hereditary family lineage. Thus Delhi *gharana,* though claiming to be a *gharana* and generally called so, is not granted *gharana*-hood by Wade because it lacks the necessary continuity of group style, although it possesses the other qualification: a hereditary family pedigree. 'Amir Khan' is granted a group and a group style—the group having no family connection with Amir Khan—but, says Wade, "whether it will become a *gharana* is yet to be seen." Followers of Amir Khan are now surely in the second generation, but that is not enough for Wade. The style should persist for another generation or two before she would be prepared to consider it as a *gharana.* Wade does not even speak of a Mewati or a Kumar Gandharva *gharana* though both have a group following and Mewati also has the desired pedigree (its group following is perhaps more recent).

The idea of a *gharana* being a group style, having in common certain important features of delineating *khyal,* seems relevant and valuable, like the notion of an intellectual circle in the realm of thought and of a school or a *qalam* in painting. But a continuity of three generations is not required as a necessary mark of an intellectual circle or a *qalam.* Why should it be so for *gharana*? The stipulation seems quite arbitrary and deliberately tailored to restrict the use of the term to a chosen group of six.

To insist on a persistence of group style over three or more generations before it can become a *gharana* has yet another fundamental problem where *khyal* is concerned. As Wade rightly points out, the transmission of musical knowledge is of basic importance in the concept of *gharana,* as it would be in any *guru-shishya-parampara.* But let us also not forget that ways of improvising and innovating are of central importance in what is transmitted in *khyal.* Every generation significantly transforms what it has received. The process of transformation is built into the very process of transmission. How, then, can we be sure if an identifiable group style has been retained? What we have of the old comes in a new garb, especially from before the age of recorded music.

Furthermore, innovation in art is not a group phenomenon but a highly individual matter. Wade is aware of this. No wonder, therefore, that she remarks, "even in the earliest history of *khyal,* contributions of individual musicians were consistently important and, indeed, frequently formed the basis of what has become associated with family or *gharana* style." Again, "some characteristics of individual style, however, remain associated with the individual artist rather than being subsumed into a group style". If individuality *is* so strong and *has been* always "consistently important", how then do we at all arrive at a group style, and one which has moreover persisted over at least three generations? Presumably there is a core which survives. But attempts at describing this core have resulted in the vaguest of accounts, quite unenlightening as to the musical content of a style. Wade's is no exception. One has only to see her table (no. 10-1 at pp. 276-277) entitled *'Khyal: characteristics of six gharanas'* to realise this:

Table 10-1. *Khyal: characteristics of six gharanas*

Characteristics	Gwalior	Agra	Sahaswan/Rampur	Alladiya Khan	Kirana	Patiala
1. Vocal technique		Aggressive		Elasticity, flexibility	Long, sustained pitches	Emphasis on developing the voice
a. quality		Powerful				
b. range	Wide		Wide	Open		Emphasis on lower register
c. ornamentation					*Kan, mind*	
2. Choice of *ragas*				Complex *ragas*	Traditional *ragas*	
				Rare *ragas*	No combined *ragas*	
3. Choice of *talas*				Emphasis on *tintal*		Emphasis on variety
4. Repertoire		Traditional and new compositions (i.e., emphasis on composing)	Large, including composing new songs		Traditional	
5. Performance speed level				Slow	Slowest	
					De-emphasis on fast speed	
a. acceleration			Slight in *bara khyal*		Slight in *bara khyal*	
6. General emphasis	Balanced emphasis on melody and rhythm	Rhythmic play	*Svara* (melody over rhythm)	Contrast	Vocal expressiveness	Balanced emphasis on melody and rhythm
	Contrast	Elements close to *dhrupad*		Rhythmic play	Emphasis on melody (*alap*) (i.e., minimum rhythmic play)	
				Close to *dhrupad*		
7. Structure of *bara khyal*						
a. pre-*ciz alap*	*Ciz*-like (tuneful)	Might be lengthy				
b. initial	Slow speed *sthai* → improv. → *antara;*	Slow speed: *sthai* → improv. → *antara*	*Sthai* & *antara* → improv.			Might omit *antara*
c. presentation of *ciz*	Medium speed: *sthai* & *antara* → improv. OR *sthai* → improv. → *antara*					
8. Improvisation						
a. *nom-tom*		*Nom-tom*-like singing		Some *nom-tom*-like improv.		
b. *bolbant*	Emphasized	Emphasized (less, recently)	Relatively little	Emphasized	Minimal	*Bolbant*-like *sargam*
c. *boltan*	Emphasized	Emphasized	Little	Emphasized	Occasional	Occasional
d. *sargam*	None	A little, recently	Judicious	In *alap* & elsewhere	Emphasized	Emphasized, *alap* & elsewhere
e. *tan*	Descending *sapat*, melodic leaps, *alankarik*, wide range	Relatively slow, clarity emphasized	*Sapat*, melodic leaps	Rippling, roller-coaster shape		Variety emphasized
9. Miscellaneous	Slow-speed *bara khyal* for *alap*-type improv.	All of *ciz* text used throughout improv.	Use of dynamics	Large proportion of performance time on *tans*	Clear text, but mostly *mukhda* phrase	All of *ciz* text used throughout improv.
	Medium-speed *bara khyal* emphasizes rhythm more	Wilful enunciation or 'mumbling' of text, for reasons of rhythm	Multiple types of improv. within one *tala* cycle		Vowels other than 'a' for sustained melody	Text & *sargam* combined in one *tala* cycle
	Active musical relationship with accompanist is likely	Active musical relationship with accompanist is likely			Use of dynamics	

(The numbering of the items is not in the original).

What can one make of such a table? One fails to find any logic in it if *gharana* is to be understood as style—though one must grant that it mirrors the kind of vague, mixed-up and incoherent judgements through which *gharana*-s are popularly distinguished, judgements containing a jumble of statements where features relevant to style are confounded indiscriminately with more accidental, historical traits contingent to style. One would have thought that Wade would help to get us out of this popular confusion.

One might, however, expect that her descriptions here are incomplete by necessity of space; they only sum up what has been described in greater and more specific detail and musical content earlier in the book. But this is hardly so. Let me illustrate with an example or two.

Take item two, choice of *raga*. One wonders what that has to do with style. A *khyal* can be sung to any *raga*. But perhaps Wade has a point. Perhaps what she means is that there are certain *raga*-s which have such an intimate affinity with certain *gharana* styles that *gharana*-s come into their own in them and are projected best in them, just as *thumri* comes into its own in *raga*-s like Pilu, Khamaj or Bhairavi and is projected best through them. It would be a significant enterprise to show such affinities, and to explore certain *raga* structures and reveal their more-than-contingent amenability to certain *gharana* styles. Wade does not make such an exploration.

In fact her definition of *khyal* itself as a style remains sketchy. It leaves essential questions unexplored. A question one is bound to ask about *khyal* is how it differs from *dhrupad*, and how from *thumri*. This difference is essential to our understanding of *khyal*. We speak of the style of certain singers as *dhrupad*-like, of others as *thumri*-like. Wade herself in her table uses such language. In item six, 'general emphasis' (in rendering of rhythm), she describes Agra as having elements close to *dhrupad* and Alladiya Khan, with the words: 'contrast/rhythmic play close to *dhrupad*'. One would expect from her a more detailed elaboration of a phrase like 'close to *dhrupad*' in terms of musical structures. A similar understanding of the differences between *dhrupad* and *khyal* is assumed in item eight which seeks to distinguish *gharana*-s on the basis of 'improvisation' under which are noted elements such as *nom-tom*. Agra has '*nom-tom*-like singing' and Alladiya Khan 'some *nom-tom*-like improvisation'. Even if we slide over the difference between 'singing' and 'improvisation' in this context, we must still ask how the *nom-tom* in these *khyal gharana*-s differs from the *nom-tom* of *dhrupad* singers.

Wade does give more body to such phrases. Comparison and contrast with *dhrupad* occurs quite frequently in her more detailed description of the *gharana* styles of Agra and Alladiya Khan and she has some interesting and structurally probing things to say. But her comments are like those made by good connoisseurs of music who *assume* the difference between *khyal* and *dhrupad* as known and understood. Surely a musicologist should not do that. He must spell out the differences more systematically in as great and basic a structural detail as possible. Such an undertaking will pose many problems, for *dhrupad* and *khyal* overlap in many ways. But it is just such an undertaking that makes musicology or *sangita-shastra* significant as a *lakshana-shastra* (the science of analysing and describing musical structure).

Wade is just not interested in such an undertaking. Her small chapter (ch. 2), concerned with defining *khyal* as genre, is poor. She hardly probes into the difference between *khyal* and *dhrupad* and *thumri*. No attempt is made to spell out the distinction between these genres in terms of basic musical idiom, that is to say the different kinds of movements that they make, phrases that they construct and *alamkara*-s that they use. These genres are not only *sung* genres. Their difference is quite as evident in *playing*. Any distinction made between them which does not recognize this central fact is bound to be weak and deficient in true musical terms. Elements of these genres that can only be sung and not played are relatively contingent in basic musical terms. Even an ancient *acharya* like Bharata, writing two thousand years ago, discriminated between the more basic musical elements of a genre (the *gandharva* which he had set out to describe), analysing and describing it in terms applicable to both singing and playing and separating this from less basic elements peculiar to singing or playing.

Describing *khyal* purely in terms of song, Wade is unable to discriminate between *khyal, dhrupad* and *thumri* in basic musical terms. The following is her list of characteristics that "distinguish *khyal* as a genre, and which are available to all *khyal singers*" (italics mine):

> The characteristics that distinguish *khyal* as a genre are of three types: (1) the particular musical materials that can be utilised, that is the *raga* (melodic mode), the *tala* (meter) and the *ciz* (the composition itself); (2) the selection of types of improvisation which are acceptable for *khyal*, that is, *alap, tan, boltan, bolbant, sargam* and *nom-tom;* and (3) the placement of all those materials for the creation of a formally balanced and aesthetically pleasing performance.

This is practically all that we get from her by way of a definition. No exposition is given of large concepts like *raga* and *tala*. Seven *tala*-s, popularly used, are listed, and *rupak* is said to have 'six counts' (p. 13). The little she has to say about *alap* (p. 27) includes nothing about this most essential element of serious music making in India. All she has to comment is that "the ways in which *alap* is carried out by different *khyaliya*-s are numerous", one major distinction being that some sing *alap* on vowels, others on vocables such as 'de' 'na'!

After listing the characteristics that make *khyal* (in the passage quoted above), she notes that complex combination of these makes *khyal* and distinguishes it as a genre. Though she realises that there are problems here, and more is needed to separate *khyal* from other genres, she still fails to tackle the problem properly, and makes short work of it:

> Placement of the *raga, tala,* and composition at the outset occurs in *tarana* and in *thumri,* but not in the majestic *alap-dhrupad*. Likewise, while other vocal genres include a selection of types of improvisation, only *khyal* includes the particular package consisting of *alap, tan, boltan, bolbant, sargam* and *nom-tom. Alap, bolbant* and *nom-tom,* for instance, are utilised in the genre *alap-dhrupad,* but not *tan, bolbant* or *sargam*.

This is practically all she has to say on the important question of distinguishing *khyal* from other genres. We find, curiously, that *tarana* is named as a genre separate from *khyal* in the same sense as *dhrupad* or *thumri*. She should only have asked: can it be played? She also names a genre called *alap-dhrupad*. Is this different from *dhrupad?* We are not told. One would also like to ask her whether it is merely the absence of *tan, boltan* or *sargam* that distinguishes *dhrupad* from *khyal*. Will use of *sargam* make a *dhrupad* a non-*dhrupad?* I have heard *dhrupadi*-s use *sargam* to great effect and that did not make their singing *khyal*. Need *khyal* necessarily use *tan?* Will its absence make it non-*khyal?* If so, we shall have to call some great *khyal* performances non-*khyal*. Wade speaks of *alap* and *nom-tom* as two separate elements both employed in what she calls *alap-dhrupad*. How is *nom-tom* separate from *alap* in *dhrupad? Nom-tom* is the name for syllables used in singing *alap* in *dhrupad*. The real question is: is the use of syllables called *nom-tom* all that distinguishes *alap* in *dhrupad* and *khyal?* Wade appears to think so. She does not ask the important question: what distinguishes them when they are played? The distinction we would find in playing would be central in singing too. Surely the *dhrupad*-style *alap* on the rudravina is not the same as the *khyal*-style *alap* by Nikhil Bannerji on the sitar. It is there that the basis of the distinction must be looked for, in the different kinds of musical movements made, phrases rendered, *alamkara*-s used.

Making *gharana* the basis for studying *khyal* leads her to consider *khyal* only as song. The larger part of the small second chapter consists of *khyal* texts with translations. One would expect these to be correctly written and translated. They are written in *nagari* with an aim at authenticity, apparently, but they are full of misspellings. The very first text (on p. 12), a well-known *khyal*, is written दैयां बठ दूभर भई. It should be दैया बट दूभर भई. The only excuse for such a mistake can be that some singer or singers sing it that way. But the text is and can be distorted in many ways. There seems no reason to accept a particular distortion as the 'standard' one. When the text is written it should be written with the standard spelling, not a favourite distortion. Almost every text has such mistakes. Let me note one or two more conspicuous ones: फिर is written as फीर. किस्मत लावे is written as किस्मत लान. अनेक रंग तरंग उपजावत is written as अने का रंग गतरंग उप जावत. Translations are not too good. One is atrocious: म्हारा रसिया बाल्मा थाने चाहे (should be चाहूं) हो राज. This is translated as, "O my handsome husband! I wish you to be a king". This Marwari line really means: "O my passionate lover/husband, I love you, my king". हो राज is a favourite phrase in Marwari love songs for addressing the lover/husband.

The *gharana* looms too large in Wade's understanding of *khyal*, being the source of what goes wrong with her book. She could have realised that the so-called *gharana*-s are just an episode in the history of *khyal*. Quoting the *Rag-Darpan* of Faqirullah (17th century), she speaks of two *khyal* singers in the court of Shahjahan. One of them was a Rajput named Ide Singh, a grandson of Raja Ram Singh of Kharagpur. He was proficient in composing *khyal* and *tarana*. Another was ascetic, Sheikh Bahauddin, who also composed *dhrupad* besides *khyal* and *tarana*. It is difficult to think of either of them as belonging to what we today call a *gharana*, unless we mean no more than a *guru-shishya-parampara* by that word. We cannot imagine the grandson of a raja to have been a hereditary musician, a member of a *gharana* system, such as we associate with more recent *khyal*.

One might argue that the age of Shahjahan was not really the age of *khyal* which was then only a nascent form. But this cannot be said of the *khyal* in the eighteenth century. There is now *in print* an eye-witness—and an ear-witness—account of *khyal* in Delhi during the period of Mohammad Shah 'Rangile' which no study of *khyal* can ignore. Wade is unaware of it though it was published in 1982; her own study was published in 1984. Perhaps the interim period was not enough for the earlier publication to become part of the general bibliography of music, a field which in any case is hardly well organised. (What is more surprising is the fact that Wade seems also unaware of S. K. Chaube's *Sangit ke Gharanom ki Carca,* published in 1977).

The eye-witness account I am speaking of is the *Muraqqa-e-Dehli.* It was written by Dargah Quli Khan, Salarjung who lived in Delhi for three years, from 1738 to 1741, during the rule of Mohammad Shah. We have from him a fascinating description of the Delhi he saw and the many musicians he heard. His Persian text has now been published with an Urdu translation by the Department of Urdu, University of Delhi.

The list of musicians that Dargah Quli describes is long. A major portion of it consists of *khyal* singers. He speaks of no less than seventeen musicians much admired for their *khyal* singing, many of them women and some very young beardless boys (*amrad*-s) who were much in favour during those days. In Delhi, at least, *khyal* was as popular a form as it is today. Only two *dhrupad* singers are named.

The *khyal* scene during Mohammad Shah's reign which Dargah Quli paints for us upsets much of the received picture we have of *khyal* history. It appears as complex and creative as the *khyal* scene today. *Gharana* as a 'group style' with 'familial' ties seems conspicuously absent. What is more evident is something like a modern 'star system', which Wade deplores, with individuals asserting themselves and shining out on their own.

Dargah Quli speaks of Nyamat Khan, also known for his bin playing, as the greatest of the many *khyal* singers in Delhi, comparing him to the *nayaka*-s of old for his mastery over *raga*-s, his technical excellence and his creativity in composing new *khyal*-s. Nyamat Khan, celebrated in the history of music as Sadarang, is the man to whom *khyal* as we know it today is traced back. It is believed that, looking to the taste of his times and that of his patron, the king, he moulded the severe *dhrupad* into the pliant *khyal,* though he never sang it himself. He taught it to two young boys, two *qawwal bacche* through whom the style became popular. (See, for example, Neumann, op. cit., p. 134.) The *gharana*-s, in many accounts, are said to have come out of the progeny of these *qawwal bacche.* Thus is a link established between Nyamat Khan, Sadarang, the chief architect of *khyal,* and the *gharana*-s.

A look at the *Muraqqa-e-Dehli* shows that this picture is mostly a myth. It is in all likelihood a myth created by the *gharana*-s themselves, and Wade, too, tacitly assumes it. Dargah Quli's account shows that Nyamat Khan was only one among many creative *khyal* singers of his time. In fact, the better ones were all creative and innovative. This seems to have been a value as greatly prized then as it is today. Many singers are called composers in their own right. Of a singer called Rahim Khan

Jahani, Dargah Quli says, "he sings *khyal* with great charm, innovating new melodies (*tarz*) and is worth listening to" (pp. 179-180). Four musicians, described as 'brothers' but more likely to have been cousins, are said to be 'matchless' (*benazir*) for their *khyal* singing, which was full of grace and flights of imagination (*nazakat aur uran*). These four 'brothers' were called Rahim Khan, Daulat Khan, Gyan Khan and Haddu. People flocked to their house to listen to them. Daulat and Rahim who were older were also more celebrated. Each sang in his own style. Daulat was loved for his thin and slight voice which could not be heard unless one was really near him. Listeners pressed forward as he sang and yet not everyone could hear him. But such a 'star' was he that when people near him shouted 'wah' 'wah', those at the back who had heard nothing, repeated these words of praise. Rahim had different qualities to commend him. He is praised by Dargah Quli for his simplicity, maturity, command over technique and beauty of presentation (p. 189). The notable individuality of these two *khyal* singers is also evident from the fact that their 'fathers'—perhaps really uncles—Kola and Savada, once famous musicians, were considered too old-fashioned by the younger set; only older people liked them (p. 180).

Ladies, too, were known for their individuality. A *khyal* singer named Uma Bai is described as 'matchless' (p. 202). Two other women, Panna and Tanno—who perhaps sang together—are said to render *khyal* with such charm that the audience was moved despite itself—listeners could not control themselves from 'crying out' exclamations of approval. Dargah Quli adds that lovers of *raga* were never tired of them (p. 202).

Even *amrad*-s (beardless youths) were famous in the genre. One called Raji—whose other attractions had diminished, for his face showed signs of an uncomely growth of beard—was yet fancied for the beauty of his *khyal* which he sang in a novel manner. His father was a well-known *qawwal* (p. 190).

There is also evidence of what may be called 'group styles', but they were current in a manner quite unlike what we associate with *gharana,* they were apparently like the 'group styles' of Amir Khan, Kumar Gandharva and Pandit Jasraj. Nyamat had disciples who were famous. Two of them, Qasim and Ali had lovely voices which had the stamp of *qabul-e-am*—they delighted everyone. A lady called Panna Bai is described as one of the *khas* (special) disciples of Nyamat Khan. She sang in his manner (*andaz*), but she sang *ghazal*-s, not *khyal* (p. 200). Another lady, Kamal Bai, delighted connoisseurs with the *khyal*-s of Nyamat Khan, though she is not said to be a disciple of this great singer (p. 201). Nyamat Khan's style thus seems to have been much cultivated, but not apparently by his family, though it was a family of musicians. Dargah Quli speaks of a brother and a nephew (he does not name them) both famous for their instrumental playing. The versatile brother was an expert at playing almost any instrument. He could play for hours with great mastery and innovativeness, mixing different melodies effectively without letting them clash (*kisi sur ki takrar nahim hoti*). Dargah Quli warmly praises his playing before adding, almost as an afterthought, that the man was also a good singer (something not uncommon among instrumentalists today). Nyamat's nephew was a sitar player. He could render on the sitar anything that other instruments were capable of. He also composed new melodies (p. 174).

Another group style seems to have been moulded by the taste of an individual patron, who was not the king. A singer called Burhani Amirkhani is said to sing to the taste of Amir Khan (*Amir Khan ke zauq ke mutabiq gata hai*). His singing is commended for its quality of composure (*thahrav*) and tranquility (p. 179). Rahim Khan Jahani, mentioned earlier, also presumably sang to the taste of Amir Khan. He belonged to the court of Amir Khan (*Amir Khan ki sarkar se wabista hai,* p. 179). Amir Khan appears to have been a rich patron, perhaps a courtier, who employed musicians and had them sing to his own individual taste.

Later *khyaliya*-s had obviously inherited a rich and complex tradition which was then, after being formed into *gharana*-s, said to go back to a single genius, Nyamat Khan, Sadarang. Dargah Quli's account even throws doubt on the equation of Sadarang with Nyamat Khan. Sadarang may have been a different *khyal* composer, perhaps older than Nyamat Khan. Though Dargah Quli has much to say about Nyamat Khan, he never associates the name Sadarang with the man. In speaking of Kamal Bai (see above), Dargah Quli says that,"she often sings the *khyal*-s of Nyamat Khan which are associated with the king (*woh aksar Nyamat Khan ke khyal gati hai jo padshah ghazi se mansub haim,* p. 201). The name Sadarang is mentioned only once, in describing the music of the *amrad* Raji (also see above). Dargah Quli says that Raji sings "*khyal*-s associated with Sadarang and sung by many in Delhi today". Dargah adds that Raji not only sung the *khyal*-s associated with Sadarang but sang them in the same enchanting style (*ajkal Dehli mem Sadarang se mansub jo khyal gaye jate haim wahi iski zaban par bhi hote haim aur usi manpasand andaz mem woh naghma sarai karta hai,* p. 190). Nyamat Khan is not named in this context. And though this does not mean that Sadarang and Nyamat Khan were not the same yet it does create room for questioning the identification. The name, or rather psuedonym, Sadarang was plainly a famous one in the Delhi world of *khyal.* Sadarang had not only composed many *khyal*-s, he was also associated with a distinct style. If Nyamat had the name Sadarang, one would have expected Dargah Quli to say so when talking of that celebrated composer.

My purpose here is not, however, to initiate a controversy regarding the identity of Sadarang, interesting though the question is. But one thing is certain, Sadarang did not initiate a *gharana,* though the *gharana*-s have made much of this myth. Nor did *khyal* in Sadarang's days feel any need for *gharana*-s. Need we, make a fetish of them?

The Kootiyattam Artistes of the Ammannur Family

G. Venu

The Chakyars are a small sect among the Ambalavasi (temple-dwellers) caste of Kerala who have been for centuries practising the histrionic art—the theatrical art of presentation and enacting of plays—as a hereditary family profession. In the field of drama they have made a creditable and very valuable contribution: they have preserved intact Kerala's ancient Sanskrit theatre tradition called Kootiyattam. Kootiyattam, it must be remembered, is the only model, now extant, of the ancient Sanskrit theatre of India. In addition to Kootiyattam, the Chakyars have been practising another allied art called Koothu as a traditional family profession.

When the Chakyar, in the guise of the *Vidushaka* (jester) relates Puranic stories in a manner replete with interest and humour, the performance is called Koothu (known as Prabandha Koothu). By and large the stories in the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* are narrated. While relating the story, the Chakyar monoacts the parts of the characters he is talking about. In the course of his discourse, the Chakyar makes very witty and satirical thrusts at persons among the audience; usually he does this by treating them as characters in the story he is narrating and addressing them or pointing them out as such. He creates opportunities to make fun of them or to ridicule them. Often he directs his satire not at individuals but at some social problem or evil, ingeniously bringing it into relevance with some event or episode in the story. The Chakyar has full freedom to ridicule any person in the audience however great he may be, provided, of course, that he depicts him as a character in the story and the satirical remarks that he makes are relevant to some context in the story.

When Kootiyattam is presented, separate actors take on the part of different characters in the drama. In the list of dramas used in Kootiyattam, *Abhisheka Natakam, Svapnavasavadattam, Pratijnayaugandharayanam, Balacharitam,* all assigned to the poet Bhasa, *Naganandam* composed by Harshavardhana, Shakti Bhadra's *Ascharya Choodamani, Subhadra Dhananjayam* and *Tapatisamvaranam* composed by Kulasekhara Perumal and Nilakantha's *Kalyanasaugandhikam,* deserve mention.

There were in Kerala some eighteen Chakyar families who were the custodians of the arts of Koothu and Kootiyattam and who had been traditionally practising these arts for centuries as a family profession. These families were known under different clan names, like Ammannur, Kuttancheri, Koipa, Potiyil etc. Each of the families was allotted a certain number of temples and it was the

responsibility of the Chakyars of that family to conduct Koothu and Kootiyattam in those temples. Koothu and Kootiyattam were religious performances conducted within temples at prescribed seasons or period as part of the rituals of the temple. As remuneration for this service the Chakyar families were given agricultural lands by the temple, the income from which would be quite sufficient for them to live in reasonable comfort. The land thus given to a Chakyar family by the temple was called Koothu Viruthi. If a family defaults in giving performances at the right time and in the right way, the land given to them could be taken back by the temple.

The Chakyars could not till the land themselves because they had to devote the whole of their time to the study and practice of their arts. So they rented out the land to tenants or Pattom. These tenants or Pattom-holders cultivated the land and gave a part of the produce to the Chakyar family.

In the performance of Koothu and Kootiyattam the Chakyars were assisted by Nambiars and others. They were also dependants of the temple and so the temple provided them with lands and other means of income. The temple also met all the incidental expenses for the performance of the Koothu and Kootiyattam. These two arts were able to survive and flourish only because of this generous assistance and patronage rendered by the temples.

The working of this system suddenly came to an end, adversely affecting the Chakyars and their arts in 1970, when the Kerala Government made drastic changes in the land-laws of the state. Under the new laws the Chakyars lost all rights on the land and the tenants or Pattom-holders became the owners of the land. All of a sudden the Chakyars and Nambiars were reduced to poverty. The Chakyar families could no longer live on the meagre income from the practice of their arts. The result was that the young members of the family had to give up their traditional profession of Koothu and Kootiyattam and seek other means of livelihood. There are today only a very small number of Chakyars of the old generation who still practise this traditional art and who are making a valiant effort to keep the art alive.

Among the Chakyar families, the Ammannur family has from ancient times occupied a high and outstanding position. The contribution of this family to the arts of Koothu and Kootiyattam is invaluable. They have not only spread and popularized these two arts and preserved them from extinction, but have also scrupulously maintained their distinctive styles and modes of presentation in all their originality, without allowing them to be modified or adulterated.

The Ammannur Chakyar family, which has been practising Koothu and Kootiyattam for centuries, originally belonged to the village of Koppam near Pattambi. This place was in Valluvanad. The ruler of Valluvanad had some quarrel with a Nambootiri and, in a fit of anger, he had the Nambootiri burned to death very secretly in an oven of the Uttupura (the kitchen and dining-hall attached to a temple). This crime was kept a close secret. Once, in the course of a Koothu, a Chakyar of the Ammannur family made an oblique reference to the event in such a way as to bring the ruler's crime to light. Enraged by this the ruler ordered the Chakyar to be bound and brought before him. But the Chakyar got scent of this in advance, and so, to escape capture and punishment, he fled with his family from Koppam and settled down in the place called Muzhikulam in Travancore.

Thus the Ammannur Chakyars became permanent settlers in Muzhikulam. We have records only about the great exponents of Kootiyattam since the time of their coming to Muzhikulam. From the records we know that in 1874 A. D. a branch of the Ammannur family settled down at Irinjalakuda in Trichur District.

There was one famous Parameswara Chakyar of the Ammannur family who was a contemporary of the celebrated poet Melpathur Narayana Bhattatiri. He was a very distinguished exponent of the arts of Koothu and Kootiyattam. He was followed by another illustrious Kootiyattam artiste named Ittiyamman Chakyar. He was a contemporary of the great Malayalam poet, Kunchan Nambiar, of the eighteenth century. It was in the performance of Parakkum Koothu that Ittiyamman Chakyar distinguished himself most. Parakkum Koothu is an episode in Harshavardhana's play *Nagananda*. The enactment of that part well demands special skill and talent of a very high order. In the fourth act of that play, *Nagananda*, there is a scene where Garuda swoops down from the top of a hill, picks up Jimuta Vahana, lying on the ground, with his beak and returns to the top of the hill. The enactment of this episode, which is very difficult, is called Parakkum Koothu.

To enact this scene another special stage, at an altitude to represent the hill, is necessary. At one side of the ordinary stage, another stage having a height of about 45 metres (44.88 metres to be exact) is built. This stage must also be equipped with a mizhavu (drum). The other participants in the performance, Nambiar and Nangiar, should be present also. This stage represents the hill on which Garuda is to appear. Sixty-four strings are tied to sixty-four different parts of Garuda's body. On the ordinary stage, at a lower level, Jimuta Vahana lies with his body covered with a red silk cloak wearing a garland of Chethi flowers (a red flower used in all *puja*-s) on his head. Garuda flies straight down towards Jimuta Vahana. When Garuda flies, every small movement of his is directed and controlled by the Nambiar, sitting on the upper stage, by cleverly manipulating the sixty-four strings. The Nambiar controls Garuda as a puppeteer controls the movements of a puppet. This means that the Nambiar must have extraordinary skill in this task. The Chakyar who plays the part of Garuda flies round and round in circles and descends gradually to the ground. He picks up the Chethi garland from Jimuta Vahana's head and returns to the upper stage which stands for the top of the hill. This part of the play is called Parakkum Koothu. It is said that whenever Ittiyamman Chakyar played the part of Garuda in Parakkum Koothu, the Nambiar who operated the strings was the great Kunchan Nambiar himself.

There is a "Shloka" which clearly refers to the performance of Parakkum Koothu by Ittiyamman Chakyar on the 23rd of Metam in the year 920 of the Malayalam Era (1745 A.D.). Whenever Parakkum Koothu was performed in a place, that place subsequently came to be called Koothuparambu. There are today places called Koothuparambu in Tripunithura, Tellichery and Irinjalakuda.

There are several stories current even today which glorify the unequalled talents and mastery of Ittiyamman Chakyar in the art of Kootiyattam. Once a 'Sastri' deeply learned in *Natya Ṣhastra* came to Muzhikulam. Having heard again and again of the unparalleled greatness of Ittiyamman Chakyar as a Kootiyattam actor, Sastri became desirous of seeing him and so he went to Muzhikulam. Arriving at

Muzhikulam in the evening he spent that night in the temple. Next morning he went to the river to bathe. After finishing his bath he sat on one of the steps of the ghat and started *japa* (prayer). Just then, somebody came to the river and went down the steps, but Sastri did not take any notice of him. That man went into the water and finally when he came out, he pressed his long hair to squeeze out all the water and threw the wet hair back. While he did this, Sastri sitting on the step above, fancied that a drop of water from the man's hair fell on his body. He was enraged because he thought that his body had been polluted in the course of his *japa* by that drop of water and so he glared at the man with anger. But he saw to his great amazement that the man below him had not a single hair on his head; his head was perfectly bald. His squeezing the hair, throwing it back and sending a drop of water from it were all a piece of magnificent acting! The astounded Sastri asked him; "Are you not Ittiyamman Chakyar?" Thus Sastri had an experience of Ittiyamman Chakyar's great talent in acting, without actually seeing any of his performances on the stage.

The death of Ittiyamman Chakyar was followed by a slack interregnum in the Ammannur family when there was not a single competent master in the family to teach the art of Kootiyattam. It almost seemed that the long tradition of practising Koothu and Kootiyattam, which the Ammannur family had kept up without a break for centuries, was going to end. But this catastrophe was averted by the timely advent of one Parameswara Chakyar. Parameswara Chakyar was the son of Ittiyamman Chakyar's niece. He came in time to maintain the long-standing tradition of the Ammannur family. In the absence of a competent preceptor in the family, Parameswara Chakyar, in his boyhood, had been forced to go elsewhere for learning the art. He went to the house of a Nambiar in Chengannur and there got training under a 'Nangiar' who had made a name for her roles as heroine. Parameswara Chakyar spent about eight years there in the course of which he mastered all the techniques of Kootiyattam. Later on he became very famous. He was known by the name 'Valiya Parameswara Chakyar'.

Valiya Parameswara Chakyar had a number of disciples. The most brilliant and outstanding among them was his own nephew, Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar. [The male members of the Ammannur family were given only the names of either Vishnu or Shiva. The most common names are Madhava and Parameswara. When two members of the same family have the same name, the older member is called 'Valiya' (Senior) and the younger, 'Cheriya' (Junior).] There is a famous story which brings out the extraordinary skill of Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar in acting. Once when a dog came barking towards him he hurled a stone at it and the dog was injured a little. The owner of that dog, an Englishman, accused Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar of unnecessarily injuring his dog. Parameswara Chakyar gave a convincing reply not in words, but by action. Without taking a stone in his hand, he feigned throwing a big stone at the Englishman; his acting was so realistic that the Englishman felt that a stone had hit him. Parameswara Chakyar told the Englishman that he had not really thrown a stone at the dog, but only enacted that part. The Englishman now believed it because he himself had experienced it. In order to convince the Englishman still further, Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar now demonstrated before him another piece of acting. He enacted Ravana's lifting the Kailasa Mountain. The Englishman was watching the performance with great attention. At one stage the mountain slided to one side. The Englishman thought that the

mountain was going to fall on him. He made a move to escape and the result was that he fell on the floor with the chair. The Englishman was so impressed by this piece of superb acting that he gave several presents to Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar.

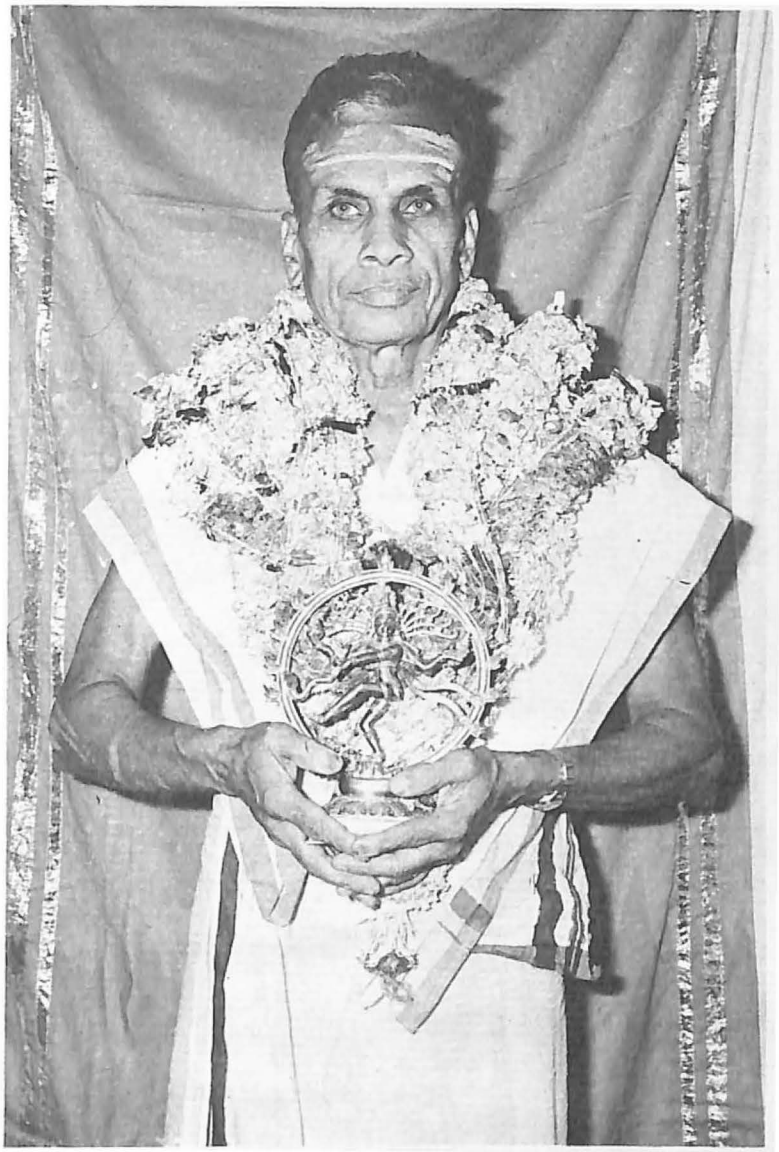
Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar lived at a time when Kathakali was slowly coming into fame and prominence. The most famous Kathakali actor at that time was Iswara Pillai. The Maharaja of Travancore (Uthram Tirunal) wanted Iswara Pillai to get better and additional training in the art of acting under Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar and for that purpose the Maharaja summoned Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar to his court. Chakyar went to the court in obedience to the summons but regretted that he could not accede to the Maharaja's wish because, according to long-standing tradition and custom, he could give direct instructions only to Chakyars, but not to anybody belonging to another caste. But he suggested a way out of the difficulty. The suggestion was that he would enact *Asokavanikamkam* Kootiyattam seven times and Iswara Pillai must watch his acting carefully and learn the techniques of acting by watching his performance. Most of the techniques of Kootiyattam acting have to be used in *Asokavanikamkam;* hence that particular play was chosen. The Maharaja and Iswara Pillai were satisfied. Iswara Pillai carefully watched the performances and learnt all the techniques. The Maharaja rewarded Parameswara Chakyar with a Virasringhala and many other presents.

During the time of Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar, the Cheruparisha Chakyar family of Kitangur, being devoid of female members, adopted a woman from the Ammannur family. This led to a union of the two Chakyar families. Thence forward the Chakyars of both the families began giving Kootiyattam performances jointly. During a short period even the domestic affairs of the Ammannur family were looked after by the Chakyars of the other family.

The chief disciple of Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar was one Madhava Chakyar of the Cheruparisha family. Kitangur Rama Chakyar who later became a very famous Kootiyattam actor was a nephew and disciple of this Madhava Chakyar.

The next two illustrious Kootiyattam artistes of the Ammannur family were Madhava Chakyar and Chachu Chakyar. Madhava Chakyar was born in 1876 A.D. He showed unequalled excellence in playing the parts of Sri Rama in *Surpanakhankam,* Sugriva in *Balivadham* and Hanuman in *Toranayuddham.* Chachu Chakyar, born in 1881 A.D., easily became the greatest Kootiyattam actor of his time. The real name of Chachu Chakyar was Parameswara Chakyar, but very few people knew him by that name. He was known more by the name Chachu Chakyar.

Chachu Chakyar distinguished himself in playing the role of *Vidushaka.* In the whole history of Kootiyattam it is doubtful whether there was ever a better actor of *Vidushaka* than Chachu Chakyar. While performing Koothu he showed remarkable ingenuity in inventing suitable occasions, that fitted very well into the story, for ridiculing or satirising people. There are several stories still current among lovers of Kootiyattam of Chachu Chakyar's extraordinary skill in this respect.



Ammannur Madhava Chakyar

A classic example, which is still remembered by many, of the witticism and inventive genius of Chachu Chakyar in delivering satirical blows obliquely at eminent men in the course of Koothu, is his ridiculing the Maharaja of Cochin who had just then abdicated his throne. A Koothu performance lasting for forty-one days by Chachu Chakyar was going on in the Koothambalam of the famous Vadakkumnatha Temple of Trichur. The abdicated Maharaja of Cochin attended the Koothu very regularly every day. Every day he would arrive at the temple a few minutes before the commencement of the Koothu and send word to Chachu Chakyar prescribing for him the particular episode or episodes of the story that he should narrate that

Ammannur Chachu Chakyar

day. The Maharaja was very particular that the Chakyar should stick to that episode and nothing else. Chachu Chakyar did not like this interference of the King in the choice of the topic for the day's Koothu. Having no choice in selecting the topic Chachu Chakyar found it difficult to prepare for the day's performance in advance. But Chachu Chakyar had to obey the Maharaja and so he yielded to his wish.

After he had put up with this inconvenient situation for some days, one day he called on the Maharaja. In the course of their friendly conversation, the King told Chachu Chakyar that his performance was not upto his usual standard; the reason

was that there was a noticeable fall in the power and cutting quality of his language. The Raja added: "The audience gets more pleasure from the witticisms and the ingenious sarcastic thrusts that the Chakyar makes at people than from his learned exposition of the meaning of the *Shloka*-s". Fortunately this remark of the Maharaja gave a chance to the Chakyar to air his grievance. So he readily replied: "Your Highness must know that I am labouring under a serious handicap. It is you who decide which portion of the story I must deal with each day. This is a great inconvenience for me. Give me a chance to choose my own topic for just one day. Then you will notice the great change in the quality of my performance." Realising the justice of this complaint, the Maharaja said: "Right, you can choose your own topic today and make me the target of your ridicule and attack."

Having got this permission from the King, Chachu Chakyar made a very judicious choice of the topic for that day. He chose a *Shloka* from the *Ramayana Prabandha* as the text for his discourse. The context was the fight between Rama and Ravana. In the course of the fight Ravana taunts Rama with references to some of his unmanly and undignified actions. Chachu Chakyar chose this particular portion because Ravana's derogatory remarks about Rama could be levelled against the Maharaja also. The *Shloka* runs thus: "Oh Raghava (Rama), you have defeated in battle a woman (Tataka), a Brahmin (Parashurama), a deer (Maricha disguised as deer) and an animal (the monkey, Bali). (The implication is that Sri Rama had not yet defeated a heroic man.) All this I know. And what is more, you have been exiled from your kingdom which was your rightful inheritance and sent to the forest and are now living on the roots and fruits available in the forest." This is the tenor of the *Shloka*.

Chachu Chakyar explained the meaning of the *Shloka* in which every line could be turned into a thrust at the Maharaja, because all the derogatory remarks made by Ravana about Rama were equally applicable to the Raja also. The Raja also, like Rama, had gained an unholy victory over a woman (a Nambutiri woman named Tatri was ostracised by the Raja on a charge of immorality); he also had a long-standing quarrel with a Brahmin in a sensational case and the Brahmin was brought to his knees in the end; the reference to Rama's eating raw fruits and roots was also applicable to the Maharaja because he was also a lover of fruits and roots; finally it was only recently that the King was forced to abdicate his throne though he had announced that he was abdicating willingly. But the truth was that he was forcibly dethroned and many people including the Chakyar knew this secret. When Chachu Chakyar was explaining this part, he turned to the Maharaja and directly asked him, of course feigning the question of Ravana to Rama: "Did you abdicate the throne of your own will? Or, were you dethroned? To save your face you will, of course, say that you gave up your throne voluntarily. But that is not the truth. You were really ousted from the throne. Why? Because your unkindly and undignified actions were becoming intolerable."

On hearing these words of the Chakyar, seemingly addressed to him, the Maharaja's face became red with anger. But the Chakyar continued his discourse calmly, undaunted by the frightening looks of the Maharaja. At the end of that day's performance, a messenger from the Raja told the Chakyar that the Raja wanted to see him the next morning. Chachu Chakyar, with some trepidation, went to see the King. By that time the Maharaja had lost all his anger and resentment. "Your rebuke

yesterday was splendid" said the Raja to him in genuine appreciation and presented Chachu Chakyar with Onapudava (a fine pair of dhoties).

There was a District Judge at Ernakulam who was in the habit of sleeping while proceedings were going on in his court. With his sarcastic strokes Chachu Chakyar once chastised him well in the course of a Koothu performance. The Judge had gone to listen to Chachu Chakyar's Koothu in the Shiva temple at Ernakulam. The story of *Dakshayaga* was the topic of the Koothu. The particular portion that Chachu Chakyar narrated that day was Sati Devi's exposition of Shiva's greatness to Daksha. The Chakyar, fixing his eyes on the Judge, quoted the words of Sati to Daksha: "Are you not in the habit of sleeping when people make remarks and complaints? Then, without understanding what they have said, you announce your verdict on the case. I tell you that this kind of indifference cannot be practised here. Don't you know that it is a great sin to act without understanding the facts and the situation?" The audience burst into laughter on hearing these words, and, it is said, that the Judge mended his ways and never slept in the court again.

From the above episodes it should not be surmised that Chachu Chakyar gave importance only to *Hasya-Rasa* (humour) in the performance of Prabandha Koothu. He was equally adept in rousing the other *Rasa*-s as well in the contexts appropriate to them. For example, while narrating stories like *Santana Gopalam* and *Rukmangada Charitam* he could actually make the audience weep. The Maharaja of Cochin honoured him with a number of awards and presents including a Virasringhala.

Some of the great living exponents of Kootiyattam of the present age are disciples of Chachu Chakyar. Two of his greatest disciples, Ammannur Madhava Chakyar and Ammannur Parameswara Chakyar, are successfully maintaining the "Ammannur Kootiyattam Tradition". They are endeavouring to keep the art of Kootiyattam alive. Another famous disciple of Chachu Chakyar was Painkulam Rama Chakyar. His contribution to the development of Kootiyattam can never be forgotten. Chachu Chakyar died in 1967 at the age of 86.

The two great living exponents of Kootiyattam of the Ammannur family are Madhava Chakyar and Parameswara Chakyar. Both of them live at Irinjalakuda in Trichur District. Born in 1917, Madhava Chakyar learned the art of Kootiyattam from his own uncles, Chachu Chakyar and Madhava Chakyar, and received intensive training under them. His Arangettam (first public performance) took place when he was only fourteen years old at the Koothambalam of Tirumandhamkunnu temple at Angadipuram. He played the part of Sri Rama in the play, *Surpanakhankam*. He studied Koothu and Kootiyattam in the traditional style for several years under his two uncles and took part with them in all the important performances in the various temples of Kerala. Madhava Chakyar is the recipient of several awards and prizes from numerous temples and patrons. In recognition of his invaluable contributions to the development of Kootiyattam, the Sangeet Natak Akademi honoured him with an award in 1979. In 1982 the Government of India conferred upon him the title of Padmashri. In 1982, under the leadership of Madhava Chakyar, a troupe of Kootiyattam artistes presented performances in "*The Rencontres Nord Sud Culture*" held in France and the Festival of India in London.

Ammannur Madhava Chakyar as Bali in Balivadham.

Parameswara Chakyar who is about one and a half years older than Madhava Chakyar has studied minutely and mastered all the techniques of Kootiyattam. He is very eager to keep Kootiyattam strictly as a temple ritual which means that its performance must be confined to the precincts of the temple. Not even once has he shown any willingness to perform Kootiyattam on a public stage outside the temple. In presenting the *Ramayana* story in twelve days and especially in enacting fully and perfectly the portion called *Anguliyankam,* which is presented as a solo performance, Parameswara Chakyar has no equal today.

Thirty-eight-year old Ammannur Parameswaran known as Kuttan Chakyar, nephew of Madhava Chakyar and Parameswara Chakyar, is the representative of the new generation of Kootiyattam artistes of the Ammannur family. Kuttan Chakyar, who has received intensive training under his uncles since his boyhood, is the great hope and promise of the future of Kootiyattam. Kochu Kuttan Chakyar, a member of the Muzhikulam branch of the Ammannur family, is another talented Kootiyattam actor. He has already achieved considerable fame as an actor of the part of *Vidushaka.*

My association with the Ammannur Chakyar family goes back to the year 1977. It was in 1982 that I began to study Kootiyattam in a serious way directly under the guidance and supervision of Madhava Chakyar and Parameswara Chakyar. Ammannur Chakyars have consistently refused to give instruction and training in Kootiyattam to any person who does not belong to the Chakyar community. I was fortunate and privileged in this matter for I was the first exception to this age-old custom. In October 1982 we started a training centre at Irinjalakuda as a memorial for Ammannur Chachu Chakyar. This Centre has been established with the object of giving training in Kootiyattam to selected candidates strictly in the traditional *Gurukula* style and also to bring back to popularity many of the ancient classical dramas, by presenting them through Kootiyattam, in all their original splendour. Seven students are at present receiving intensive training at the centre. Madhava Chakyar and Parameswara Chakyar are in charge of their training. One creditable achievement of this school is that it revived and enacted three Kootiyattam plays: *Ashokavanikamkam, Jatayuvadhamkam* and *Kalyanasaugandhikam* which had long remained forgotten. The school revived these plays and presented them in all their originality and details in the years 1982, 1983 and 1984 respectively. A group of Kootiyattam artistes trained at this institution, led by Guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar, presented Kootiyattam performances at the Festival of India held in Switzerland in 1987 and in Japan in 1988.

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Songs of India

Robert J. Del Bonta

The hidden gems are rich beyond measure,
Unnumbered are the pearls thy ocean treasure,
Oh wondrous land! Oh land of India!

"Song of India" from *Sadko*[1]

In the opera *Sadko* of 1898 by Rimsky-Korsakov, the hero Sadko asks three merchants to sing of their native lands so that he can decide which one he wants to visit. The merchants are the Viking, the Venetian, and the Indian. After hearing the three songs including the overly familiar and enticing description of India, "Song of India", for some unexplained reason Sadko proceeds to choose Venice. I believe that Sadko made a terrible mistake. I say this in spite of the fact that I would describe India in a very different manner, in equally glowing but not quite so affluent terms.

There are many operas which mention or are about India from all periods of our musical heritage. Although many of these operas have been recorded or discussed in books, very little is ever said about their content. Much verbiage is given over to such things as "Hindu melodies" referring to the oriental flavor of the music. This is especially true in reference to Massenet's use of the unfamiliar saxophone for a waltz followed by "Hindu melody" for flute in the Paradise scene of *Le Roi de Lahore*. The use of the title "Hindu" is extremely misleading to a Western reader. No Indian would recognize such a thing as Indian, just as no Chinese would feel that Puccini's *Turandot* sounds anything but foreign to his ear. These often repeated comments are entertaining to read, but perhaps a more logical thing to say is that Massenet used the exotic situation of his opera to introduce exotic new sounds and strikingly original melodies. To call these melodies "Hindu" merely points out the European *naiveté* about things Indian. More important to consider are the plots of the stories. One must consider whether a French version of a love triangle set in Sri Lanka, as seen in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, is as Ceylonese as an Italian version of a Scottish story such as *Lucia* is Scottish. Despite the Italianate quality of *Lucia*, one can view Europe as a cultural unit, but how do Westerners view something as foreign and remote as the Indian sub-continent?

Having been a student of India for all of my adult life and a lover of opera for almost as long, it has been a constant source of pleasure to me to hear India mentioned in odd contexts in a great many operas and directly dealt with in what are, in my opinion, some rather good works. When the Vendor of Animals in *Der Rosenkavalier* offers parrots from India during the *levée* of the Marschallin, I can almost hear the loud squabbling of those loveable creatures in the Islamic ruins of Delhi. When earlier in the same scene, the powder of the Queen of Golconda is mentioned, images of the Kohinoor diamond, which was probably mined there, and

the climb to the top of the magnificent Golconda Fort near Hyderabad in Southern India pass across my mind.

Other operas include Indian characters adding a cosmopolitan quality to exotic operas set in the East. The most well-known example due to performances in recent decades is the character Idreno in Rossini's *Semiramide* of 1823. Indian titles for characters in operas happen in the 18th century as well, as seen in Philippe Rameau's *Les Indes Gallantes* of 1736 (about many of the "Indies") with its Persian Prince who is also King of India and Antonio Salieri's *Cublai* concerning Kublai Khan where an Indian princess finds her way to Central Asia. These characters are gratuitous additions doing very little to further the plots of their operas. An opera with Indian elements which actually function in the plot is Sir Michael Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage* of 1955 where two of the characters become transfigured as the Hindu God Shiva and his consort Parvati.

While these enticing allusions to India appear in operas from time to time, the operas which deal directly with India run the full gamut of our operatic heritage. The first use of India as a setting is found in the many operas based on Pietro Metastasio's *Alessandro nell'Indie*. Metastasio's text was set by a large number of composers during the 18th century including Porpora in 1730, Handel in 1731, Galuppi in 1738, Gluck in 1744, Sacchini in 1763, as well as Cimarosa, Hasse, Cherubini, J. C. Bach, etc. The operas are variously labelled by the full title or after the Indian king Poro (usually called Porus in the classical accounts) who fought Alexander during the Indian campaign. The plot line suggests a knowledge of the classical sources, since after Porus' defeat Alexander restored him to his kingdom. A fictitious character, the Indian queen Cleofide, adds the necessary soprano role to these *opera seria*.

The operas to be considered here follow later conventions and there is an attempt to be about India rather than merely set there. The oldest opera about India still performed is Adolphe Adam's *Si J'étais Roi* of 1852 which is the story of an Indian youth who scribbles the words "If I were King" in the sand and gets his wish. The important thing about this opera is that the opera concerns Indians themselves and not merely set in India to illustrate the magnanimity of a character like Alexander. The choice of the setting is clearly for its exotic possibilities, but at the same time this choice allowed composers more freedom from the old traditions, contributing a great deal to the development of romantic opera. From *Si J'étais Roi* to the most recent of Indian operas, Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Last Savage* of 1963 (first performed as *Le Dernier Sauvage*, a comic opera about a rich American girl's anthropological aspirations and her search for the abominable snowman), Phillip Glass' *Satyagraha* of 1980 (about Mahatma Gandhi) and Per Nörgard's *Siddharta*[2] of 1983 (about the early life of the historical Buddha and his decision to renounce the world when a dancer dies before him), the audience is presented with a variety of Indias—in some cases over-romanticized, in others fairly true to the realities of India, but always exotic.

Unlike *Si J'étais Roi* many of the operas about India are no longer in the repertoire (the Adam opera was recently revived by a small company in London). Mentions of other little-known works such as Alfano's *La Leggenda di Shakuntala* of 1921 tantalize my imagination. The latter, in particular, conjures up the finale to Puccini's *Turandot* finished after his death by Alfano and memories of my struggles

to translate *Shakuntala,* the most famous of all Sanskrit plays, over fifteen years ago. Both Louis Coerne (1904) and Felix Weingartner (1884) offered operatic versions of the playwright Kalidasa's *Shakuntala,* while a ballet by Ernest Reyer with a book by Gautier premiered in 1858 and a famous overture by Karl Goldmark by the same title dates from 1865. All of these were presumably based on the early translation by Sir William Jones of 1789 (translated from the English into German by Georg Forster in 1791 and into French by A. Bruguiere in 1803) which was widely known in the intellectual circles of Europe. Even Franz Schubert began an opera based on the play as early as 1820, but he never completed it. Alfano's opera has recently been staged at the Wexford Festival, 1982, where apparently it was staged as a performance in a crumbling hotel during the English Raj![3]

While one can imagine the classical presentation of the Shakuntala operas, other titles offer only vague, tantalizing hints of the plot lines—such as Donizetti's *Il Paria* which hints of untouchables and was based on C. Delavigne's *Le Paria* of 1821. Many references to pariahs are found throughout this period in both literary and theatrical works. Other operas which tempt us are Donizetti's *La Regina di Golconda* of 1828, Franz Adolphe Berwald's *Drottingen av Golconda* of 1864 (1st performed in Stockholm in 1968), Berton's *Aline, Reine de Golconde* of 1803, and Boieldieu's opera of the same name of 1804, as well as a number of ballets with similar titles. These works are all presumably based on the play by S. J. de Boufflers and hint of the same queen of Golconda who lent her powder to Strauss for *Der Rosenkavalier.* Mentions of *Les Bayadères* of 1810 by Catel (the famous ballet by Minkus of 1877 was entitled *La Bayadère*) and *The Temple Dancer* by John Adam Hugo, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1919, are equally tantalizing. An operetta by Kalman called *Bayadère* is different than these other works since it is not about an Indian temple dancer but concerns an actress in a play by that title who is loved by an Indian maharaja.

Besides these few operas a quick list of some of the operas still in the repertoire giving Western operatic impressions of the Indian sub-continent includes: *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* by Georges Bizet of 1863; *L'Africaine* (a title which refers to color, not to race or continent) by Giacomo Meyerbeer of 1865; *Le Roi de Lahore* by Jules Massenet of 1877; *Lakmé* by Léo Delibes of 1883; *Savitri* by Gustav Holst of 1916 (but written in 1908); and, *Padmavati* (an opera-ballet) by Albert Roussel of 1923.

Many of these operas have had productions in North America during the last decade or so: *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* in San Francisco and New York; *L'Africaine* in San Francisco; *Le Roi de Lahore* in Vancouver; *Lakmé* in Dallas, New York, and Chicago; *Savitri* in San Francisco and Baton Rouge; *The Last Savage* in Charleston; and, *Satyagraha* at Artpark in Lewiston, New York.

The most interesting thing for an Indophile is that few of these operas owe much to the real India. One might presume that this fact would be disappointing, but many of the mistakes and oddities of the libretti illustrate the way that the West has viewed India over the past few centuries beginning with the lush tropical setting for melodrama in the Adam opera and ending with Glass' rather surrealistic vision of the Mahatma set to verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* sung in Sanskrit. With the exception of the most recent operas concerning India, the picture of India is often lumped together with an equally hazy vision of the Islamic world. This may not

seem true at first glance, considering that the plot lines of the most popular of these operas are consistently Hindu; but few Hindus would accept food from the hands of characters named Leila, Selika, Alim, and Hadji.

Les Pêcheurs de Perles contains many such names. Leila is the name of the Hindu priestess in the opera, but it is also the name of a very popular heroine in Persian literature, indeed the heroine of the opera *Leyli and Medzhnun* by Uzeir Abdul Husein Hajibeyov, a Persian composer from Azerbaijan. Nadir, Zurga, and Nourabad are Persian as well, but they are all plopped down in a fishing village in Sri Lanka, the tropical paradise depicted in so many of the French operas about India.

After the duet "Au fond du temple saint" for tenor and baritone (often referred to as "that duet from *The Pearl Fishers*" on FM radio) the priestess Leila makes her entrance. Both the tenor and baritone have loved and forsaken her, but her reappearance—heavily veiled and ordered not to speak to any man—starts the drama rolling. Needless to say, the tenor and soprano sing lengthily of their love, the baritone finds out, condemns them and then saves them. The whole plot rests on the fact that the lady is veiled. This of course is *purdah*, a practice found in India but only after the Muslim conquest which did not quite make it to Sri Lanka. There is a good reason the West has always related to the harems or *zenanas* of North India. The reason is that they are basically Mediteranean, culturally linked with our own traditions. At the same time the West has failed to depict the less protected Hindu ladies of pre-Islamic India. Even today the ladies of the South do not cover their heads in the presence of a man, while their North Indian sisters are often kept from sight.

Most of these operas are Hindu in theme, but much of their romance owes a great deal to the picture of the veiled lady in the harem, removed from the world and, therefore, desired by every male around—after all they must be beautiful if they are protected in such a fashion. For an old India hand with a rather strong penchant for the Hindu world, Leila's predicament as she sings to the great god Brahma is musically beautiful, but difficult to accept when forced into an historical setting.

The grandest of the 19th century French grand operas is *L'Africaine*, the last work of Giacomo Meyerbeer. Again we are presented with a tropical landscape including a deadly tree under which the Indian beauty Selika grandly inhales its perfumes in a sophisticated and melodic, if not quite believable, suicide. Her Western lover, Vasco da Gama, lends some basis of historical accuracy to the plot, but, as usual in these Indian operas, the name Selika hints of an Arabic heritage for this Hindu queen-priestess, just as the earlier protagonists of Bizet's opera hint of Persian origins.

The plot line of *L'Africaine* is anticipated in part by the opera *Jessonda* of 1823 by Louis Spohr based on A.M. Lemierre's *La Veuve de Malabar* about the love of Tristan d'Acunha for the widow of the Maharaja of Goa. The similarities are primarily the Portuguese-Indian connection, since in this opera the lovers are united after the widow is saved from death on her husband's funeral pyre.

While at least one source suggests that Jules Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore*, his first opera written for L'Opera in Paris, was based on a story from the *Mahabharata* (the longer of India's two great epics), the story suggests otherwise.[4]

Again the names used are surprising. Timour, the name of the Muslim Central Asian conqueror (the Tamerlane of our high school English classes), is quite inappropriate for a Brahman priest. Scindia, the name of the heroine's uncle, is an Indian name but used only by the most recent ruling family of Gwalior, many years and miles removed from Lahore during the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century. Needless to say, the hero Alim and his servant Kaled sound as if they should be fighting on the side of Mahmud! They are Muslim without a doubt. Sita, the heroine, and the god Indra are the only authentic Hindu names of the lot.

While the setting of *Le Roi de Lahore* is historically accurate, the action owes more to the heritage of the West than to India. The concept of the incestuous uncle in a Brahman family is bad form to say the least. The definition of incest in India for North Indian Brahmans includes many unrelated "relatives", based on elaborate family lineages dividing the many Brahman groups into clans, as well as an incredible number of distant but quite real relatives. Needless to say, incest was not exactly condoned in Massenet's France, but the plot line of the opera suggests that had Sita wished, she could have married her uncle. In fact, she would not have been able to marry anyone with a common ancestor for a good number of generations on both her father's and mother's side. It is true that different systems existed in South India (notably cross-cousin marriage) and since the French possessions in India centered in that area, the librettist may have thought that he was presenting a possible Indian marriage practice; but it seems more likely that this titillating addition was used to underscore the barbaric immoral qualities of the character of Scindia. This particular detail of the plot would have been impossible in an opera set in the West, although in Verdi's *Ernani* the heroine is loved by her uncle. At the same time the idea of the dead king's trip to Indra's heaven and his return to earth to claim his love is incredibly romantic, but it seems to be Massenet and his librettist through and through.

My favorite Indian opera, for a variety of reasons, is Léo Delibe's *Lakmé,* which owes much to the same interest in the exotic of the earlier French operas. In it we find the most Muslim of all names: the Brahman priestess Lakmé has a servant (variously called servant or slave in the librettos accompanying the recordings) named Hadji, implying that this pure and orthodox Hindu girl (with an extremely strict father!) had a Muslim servant who had made the *hajj,* visited Mecca. Most surprising! It might be possible for Hindus to have Muslims around the house (not eating with them of course) but the picture one gets of Lakmé's father is one of very strict orthodoxy ruling out both unclean caste-less Muslims and Englishmen alike. Some of the characters of the opera fare better, although the name Lakmé is not the classical Sanskrit spelling, the more authentic form should be Lakshmi. Lakmé's father has a real Brahman name, Nilakantha (literally translated as "Blueneck", a title of the great god Shiva whose neck turned blue when he swallowed poison to save others at the Churning of the Ocean) which implies that Delibe's librettists were doing their homework. There is a definite attempt to portray India in this opera, although some of it may seem wrong. We can notice these errors since we are in a more fortunate position to uderstand India than 19th century librettists.

It is often stated that the libretto of *Lakmé* is based on *Le Mariage de Loti* by Pierre Loti (pseud. for Julien Viaud),[5] but even after a glance at this charming fictionalized travelogue it is soon discovered that it is not about India at all, but takes

place in the South Seas. The point is that rather than saying "based on" these accounts of the opera should read "inspired by". Both works concern an East-West romance and on one level may suggest the non-Western siren, but both Rarahu, the amoral primitive girl from Bora-Bora in the novel, and Lakmé, clearly the product of a sophisticated and highly moral ancient civilization, are destroyed by their encounters with the West. The men survive. Lakmé is driven to suicide, while Rarahu takes on with any good-looking sailor before she succumbs to her malady.

For the opera buff it is curious that another book by Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, was the inspiration for the series of works which led to Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly.* Although about Japan and a Japanese wife for a foreigner, *Madame Chrysanthème* has little to do with Puccini's popular opera. Where Loti plays the amoral Frenchman communing with nature and women in Tahiti and Japan, the operatic characters of Gerald and Pinkerton are quite different.

I am not sure if many who have visited India can completely believe the setting of *Lakmé.* During my travels, I have yet to find the tropical garden in which Lakmé is kept by her father, but I have searched for it and I really do hope that I find such a thing amid the harsh realities of India. At the same time the story of the love between the innocent Lakmé and the Britisher, whose call to duty leads her so quietly into suicide, is extremely moving, if not quite Indian in sentiment and content. Where in *Madama Butterfly* the amoral and somewhat dense Pinkerton pushes Cio Cio San to her grand rite of suicide, Gerald seems less guilty. He certainly has no Sharpless to warn him of the delicate nature of the heroine; rather, he and Lakmé become the victims of the confrontation of two cultures.

Lakmé is the only opera holding the stage which deals with the English experience in India while both *Jessonda* and *L'Africaine* deal with the Portuguese in India. It is interesting that British literature did not give rise to any opera still performed today. The only operas mentioned in the standard references are both based on Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* from his *Oriental Tales.* They are Spontini's *Nurmahal* of 1822 (based on his play with songs *Lalla Rookh* of 1821), Rubinstein's *Feramors* of 1863, David's *Lalla Rookh* of 1877, Lalo's *Namoura* of 1882, and a few ballets. The most telling revival of an opera could be of *The Englishmen in India* of 1828 by Sir Henry Bishop.

A common feature between the heroines of *Les Pêcheurs de Perles, Le Roi de Lahore, Lakmé,* and in a way *L'Africaine* as well, is the concept of the Indian priestess. The grand treatment of this theme and the way that the maiden is kept away from men (while relating to the Eastern *purdah*) seems very close to the Vestal Virgins of the West, who are found in opera in various guises from the obvious Roman *La Vestale* by Spontini to the Druid *Norma* by Bellini. In India some women were attached to temples, but as Frederic in *Lakmé* states, they were not quite virginal. Besides wives of chief priests, who are necessary for certain rituals, many of the ladies attached to temples were *devadasis* or "slaves of the god" who danced in the elaborate halls of the temple precincts. In many instances the money made by them in many different types of entertainment went into the coffers of the temple. On seeing the *bayadères* in *Lakmé,* the rather prim English governess Miss Bentson asked whether these dancers were Vestal Virgins. Gerald's friend Frederic's response amounts to Vestal Virgins with nothing to guard. At this point on the London Records recording featuring Dame Joan Sutherland as Lakmé,

Miss Bentson exclaims "Oh, Shocking!", an addition to the libretto which is quite in character.[6] While the *bayadères* of India were of easy virtue, Leila, Sita, Lakmé, and Selika were purer in their activities. Had they been of easier virtue perhaps much of the tragedy of these operas could have been averted.

It is with *Savitri* by Gustav Holst that we find our first genuine Indian story. This falls into what is called Holst's Indian period which includes an opera *Sita* of 1900-06, a cantata entitled *Cloud Messenger* of 1909-10, and both Hymns and Choral Hymns from the *Rig Veda*. *Savitri* truly is a tale from the *Mahabharata* and Holst, his own librettist, tells it as it was written. With its small orchestra consisting of two string quartets, a contra-bass, two flutes, and an English horn, the music of *Savitri* may not be in the same grand manner of the French operas already discussed, but it is extremely compelling. It tells the beautiful story of the outwitting of Death by Savitri, the devoted wife, and the return to life of her husband Satyavan. Rather than offer her own life to save that of her husband, as does the Western Alceste in Gluck's opera, Savitri approaches the matter from a purely Indian point of view—she asks for her own life. When Death points out that she already has it, she instructs him in the definition of what life is to a woman: to fulfill her functions of wife and mother. In India a husband's death is related to the merit (*karma*) of his wife, and the plight of the childless widow is often extremely unpleasant. Only the land which shocked the British with its numerous *suttees* could present such a non-modern sentiment in so poignant a manner.

While Holst's story comes from the ancient literature of India, as did the few operas based on Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, I have to date heard only one opera which is based on an actual event in the rich history of India. That opera is *Padmavati* by Albert Roussel. There is also a ballet by the same title by Leo Staats from 1923. Its tale is set against the historical struggle between the Hindu lords of North India and the incursions of the Muslims. *Le Roi de Lahore* shares a similar backdrop, but where Massenet's opera was pure fiction, the incident around which *Padmavati* is built actually took place. *Le Roi de Lahore* is set in the early 11th century when Mahmud of Ghazni habitually raided India from his base in what is now Afghanistan. By the time that the action of *Padmavati* takes place, 1303, Muslims had invaded much of North India and established kingdoms, the most important of which was the Delhi Sultanate. In 1303 'Ala-ud-din Khalji, the villain of *Padmavati*, had been on the throne of Delhi for seven years and he was to rule for another thirteen. He was the first really powerful Sultan of Delhi and had grand plans for conquering much of India. Indeed, while he was attacking the rich Hindu city of Chitor, where the action of the opera takes place, his generals were making the first conquests for Islam in South India.

The characters of the opera are, on the whole, accurately named. Ratan Sen is Ratan Singh, the Maharaja of Chitor, and the husband of the beautiful and the accomplished Padmavati, originally a princess from Sri Lanka and named Padmini in history. The historical uncle and cousin of Padmini, Gora and Badal respectively, are members of Ratan Sen's staff in the opera. 'Ala-ud-din is presented as a Mughal, although the Mughals did not take control of India until the fall of the Delhi Sultanate in the early 16th century.[7]

The Indian concept of history is sketchy at best and native Indian historians have embroidered most of their accounts lacing them with mythology

and chronological inconsistencies. The story of Padmini is known in a number of versions, but basic elements are present in each of the many accounts which I have found in written and oral traditions. I believe that the first published Western version is that found in Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* of 1829.[8] Roussel actually visited the site of Chitor, presumably hearing the story told there, and together with his librettist, Louis Laloy, based their version on a French retelling of the tale by Théodore Pavie.

The basic story line is that 'Ala-ud-din heard of the great beauty of the wife of Ratan Singh and managed to see her, at which point he demanded her for his own. She was promised to him and a great entourage of ladies were to be sent to his camp. Instead of the ladies the litters contained the bravest warriors of Chitor. A battle ensued and after a long siege the Hindu defenders of Chitor were beaten. 'Ala-ud-din entered the city to find that many virtuous ladies, including Padmini, had burnt themselves to death rather than fall into the hands of the Muslim invaders.

The opera has all these basic elements including many of the names, but it is quite different in rather telling ways. The most incredible thing is that Padmavati is actually encouraged by her husband to save the city by giving herself to the Sultan. I doubt whether the Rajput ladies of today would like to hear that. They revere Padmini considering her the noblest of their breed. That in turn implies a very noble husband, historically a husband who went to his death knowing full well that Padmini had already saved her honor.

In the French version Padmavati has to murder her husband to ensure her own *suttee*, her death on his funeral pyre.[9] At Chitor during the heat of the battle noble women in thousands are said to have gone to their fiery deaths. They certainly did not have to resort to murder. Ratan Singh's honor would not allow Padmini to be taken and the idea that he would suggest that she lose her honor, and consequently his own, is beyond belief. An important factor is that this whole predicament with a man ready to defile the honor of the heroine does make for good opera; but, I doubt whether a librettist would be ready to set this story of betrayal in Europe with tales of Arthurs and Guineveres, while he was willing to make the barbaric Easterner act in such a manner.

There are a number of minor details in the opera that appear to relate to the actual story itself. The most interesting is when the priests tell Padmavati that more than one victim is necessary; hence, in the opera at least, the god condones the murder. In the most common legend Ratan Singh has a vision of the goddess of the city who informs him that his sons must each meet their deaths for her to be fully satiated. Perhaps this vampire-like goddess appears in the opera as one of the six female manifestations of the god Shiva who come to test Padmavati's virtue prior to her ritual of *suttee*.

The final outcome of a study of Western operas about India is that they owe most of their message to the West. Where the philosophy of India (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina) had so much influence on the intellectual development of Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, there was little interest in the dramatic possibilities found in Indian literature. Such obvious things as the mysticism of Wagner owes much to the early German Sanskritists who molded an entire era of European thought. Wagner's interest in Indian philosophy, primarily an interest

in Buddhism, is well attested to and his Buddhist opera *Die Sieger* remained uncomposed at his death. The importance of his studies of Indian literature and philosophy is seen in many of his operas including *Parsifal,* so often considered the ultimate Christian opera. In fact in the opening scene of *Parsifal* a swan is killed, an incident that must be based on the opening of the *Ramayana.* His famous Ring Cycle ends with Brünnhilde's immolation which must relate to the rite of *suttee.* The point is that Wagner was the product of his age and German intellectual and religious thought of the period was drawn from a wide range of sources, in particular Indo-European ones. Another German who was even closer to the mainstream of Indian philosophy was the great Goethe, whose many works owe much to his Indian studies. These works in turn have been so important as sources of opera libretti. The fact that India lies behind the psychological drama of a Faust or a Werther is rarely, if ever, considered. At the end of Boito's operatic version of Goethe's Faust legend the hero says "Si . . .ma il Real fu dolore e l'Ideal fu sogno". (Yes . . .but reality was suffering and the ideal was a dream.) What could be more obviously Indian!

Indian thought lies behind much which we do not recognize as Indian, while the operas about India almost completely ignore India's contribution to European thought. India is used solely for its exotic connotations and presumably to allow for some pretty ourageous costumes and sets, including the common mistake in the theater of draping the *sari* over the wrong shoulder! For anyone who knows India well it is in many ways unforgivable to see these obvious errors. So often sets and costumes refer to another ethnic area—Thai dancers set in Indonesian ruins, for instance. Granted a designer may wish for an exotic setting for his opera, but a designer could open the right books for a change and do it correctly! For a designer who wishes to set *Lucia di Lameromoor* in Roman ruins or as a sequel to *Star Wars,* the usual approach to these operas is legitimate.

All in all India has fared pretty well with its treatment in the theater. From at least the period of Gluck, the Arab world has been used for a similar exotic purpose, but the treatment of the Islamic characters has been far from fair. These operas comprise a rich subject for a future study. Where many of the "Arab" operas have been comedies peopled with buffo characters with titles like Beg and Sultan, the "Indian" operas are usually peopled with heroines who are handled in compassionate and melodramatic tragedies.

When Sadko asked the Indian merchant to sing of his native homeland, the merchant should have laced his "Song of India" with descriptions of these great beauties—Leila, Selika, Sita, Lakmé, and the rest. If Sadko could not be enticed by promises of great wealth, these alluring beauties may have done the trick. Better still the merchant could have sung Felix Mendelssohn's musical setting of Heinrich Heine's Indian vision:

> On wings of song
> beloved, I shall bear you away
> away to the banks of the Ganges;
> there I know the loveliest spot . . .

There will we lie
beneath the palm-tree
and drink deep of love and peace
and dream a blissful dream,

"On Wings of Song"[10]

NOTES:

1. "Song of India," trans. by H. Cecil Cowdrey, found in *56 Songs You Like To Sing* (New York: Shirmer, 1937), pp. 161-162.
2. The Buddha has received some attention in the musical world. Delibes planned an opera called *Siddharta* which was never written and Hubert Bath wrote incidental music for *The light of Asia.*
3. There are a few pieces which relate to another classic story, that of Nala and Damayanti. These include an opera *Nal and Damayanti* of 1899 by Arensky and a piece for soprano, choir and orchestra entitled *Damajanti* by Max Bruch.
4. Leslie Orrey, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Opera* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 300.
5. For instance see: The Earl of Harwood, ed., *The New Kobbe's Complete Opera Book* (New York: C. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), p. 821.
6. See the libretto with English translation by Peggie Cochrane to London Records Boxed Set OSA 1391 (London: The Decca Record Company Ltd., 1969), p. 18.
7. It is interesting to note that in his translation of the libretto for a private recording of *Padmavati* (MRF-141-S, 1977), David Lambert chooses to rectify (?) matters by translating the word "mogol" as "mongol." This still places the wrong ethnic group on the scene. 'Ala-ud-din was a Khalji and the family is usually described as Afghanized Turks. The recent commercial recording (Angel DSBX-3948) uses "mogul" in the English version.
8. Tod has recently been republished. (New Delhi: K. M. N. Publishers, 1971). The account of Padmini is given in Vol. I, pp. 213-216.
9. According to the short article by Dom Angelico Surchamp in the booklet accompanying the Angel recording cited above (p. 6), the decision not to have Ratan Sen die in battle was made by Roussel and Laloy and is not found in the Pavie original.
10. "On Wings of Song," trans. by Gwen Morris (copyright 1965) found in the enclosed text for "A World of Song," with Victoria de los Angeles, Angel Records, 36296.

News & Notes

International Congress on The Female Role, *International School of Theatre Anthropology, Holstebro, Denmark, September 17-22, 1986.*

The Female Role, as interpreted on the stage in various cultures, was the subject of a six-day (September 17-22, 1986) International Congress in Holstebro, Denmark. It was organised by the Odin Theatre founded by Eugenio Barba. This, the fourth session of the Odin Theatre's extended activity, had both a didactic and anthropological perspective. It dwelt on the actor's 'presence' and on theatrical 'extra' technique as opposed to 'daily' technique.

Practitioners and masters, from both the Oriental and Occidental theatres, held centre stage through hours of detailed explanatory demonstrations and evening performances. It was amply clear to the international congregation of directors, actors, critics, biologists, psychologists, psyco-linguists and, of course, anthropologists that unlike previous sessions—often running into four to six weeks of practical participation—this congress was structured on a 'learning' situation. This meant learning to learn, learning to see, learning to understand the principles governing that process in an organism which makes it 'live' in a theatrical situation.

The focus was on the mental and physical energy, distinct in 'daily' and 'extra-daily' techniques and residing at the base of different traditions. Energy as a personal temperature-intensity awakened, determined and moulded by the actor was relentlessly explored. Barba's concern was not so much the 'visible' energy level projected through the working of the actor's body and voice as the 'invisible' energy that determines this 'body-in-life' in theatre.

Attempting to break down the shell of 'invulnerability' that the artiste builds with learning and practice, Barba tried to present the master artistes/pedagogues in their 'vulnerable' states. Each was asked to go back to his/her origins, particularly the first day of training and thereby recreate the moment when conscious choices had to be made. The 'indiscriminate' playing of male and female roles by the Oriental dance theatre artiste became the focus of attention.

Representing the other sex is a long tradition in China, Japan, Bali and India. The phenomena is rooted in history—social, economic and cultural. The women participants wanted at some point to go into issues like the repression and emancipation of women in this context. But it became increasingly clear that a separate Congress was required for 'sex, performance and society'.

The Congress was dedicated to the legendry Chinese actor Mei-Lan-fang, famous for his Tan (female) roles. It discussed at length the double-edged nature of an actor's energy, namely 'the Anima or the living and intimate wind' as it is 'drawn towards something external' that it desires and so changes to Animus. Making it clear that the terms did not refer to the male and female, Barba defined the two poles as *'lasya'* and *'tandava'* or *'manis'* and *'kras'* (in the Balinese tradition), representing softness and vigour.

The emphasis then was on the discovery of the dynamic relationship between these two poles and the actor's ability to move from one pole to the other,

Taiwan actress playing the Female Warrior.

showing the dominant profile of his energy and also revealing its double. This double tension, the material source of the spectator's experience can only be understood by the synaesthetic sense. In a way, the Congress aimed at an analysis of this 'synaesthetic sense' via a series of 'de-vulnerizing processes'.

Given the subject, the choice of participants was a natural consequence. Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Sanjukta Panigrahi (Odissi), Gautam (Gotipua), M. P. Sankaran Namboodiri, K. M. Vijayakumar (Kathakali), Katsuko Azuma, Kanho Azuma (Nihon Buyo, Japan), Kanichi Hanayagi (Kabuki, Japan), Mei Bao-Jiu (Peking Opera), Pei Yan-Ling (Hebei Opera), Swasthi Widjaja Bandem, daughter Ary, Ni Made Waratini and Ni Ketut Suryatini (Balinese Dance) and three performers from Taipei—Tracy Chung, Yvonne Lin, Helen Liu—with a number of musicians represented the Oriental tradition.

In the absence of Franca Rame of Italy (she was ill), the Occident was represented by Sonja Kehler of East Berlin and Iben Nagel Rasmussen of the Odin Theatre. The former is part of the school, trained in the traditional theatre of Brecht in East Berlin, and the latter belongs to the Autodidactic Group Theatre.

The afternoon of the 17th was a private interaction between Barba and the participants. Only the Odin Theatre workers and one or two others were allowed to view what Barba called 'building of a river representing a continuous flow of energy'. Starting off with Sanjukta, his oldest 'collaborator in ISTA', he invited each participant to create a ceaseless flow of energy and make the 'river dance'. This prelude saw a fascinating interweaving of complementary and contrasting energies where a performer would invite his co-pedagogue from a different tradition to either take off from where he/she left off in a particular psychic state or try and complement it with another.

The theme of love and war offered by Barba saw fascinating interplay of *'lasya'* and *'tandava'* between Iben and Balinese, Kathakali and Nihon Buyo, Odissi and Kabuki counterparts. It was not the sex of performer but the energy of the emotion that revealed the potential power of the Oriental forms with Sanjukta playing the 'male' to Kelucharan's 'female', Sankaran playing 'female' to Katsuko's 'male' and all in a wordless, seamless movement lasting some two hours or more.

The Japanese team (led by Katsuko Azuma) demonstrated the teaching method with personal student-teacher encounters. Unlike the Odissi and Kathakali traditions, the Nihon Buyo artistes start their training by learning important 'numbers' from the repertoire. The teacher begins by first bodily holding the student to mould the right posture and then asking him/her to imitate the exact movements of the item. Both the female and male roles are taught right from the beginning, and the student has to learn to change from one to the other via a definite posture code.

The concept of *vayu/bayu* (Balinese), *vayu talluka* (Kathakali) was in the forefront in discussions relating to the shift in energy from the 'strong' to 'soft'. Dwelling upon the twin attributes of character in Balinese dance—*'cras'* (strong) and *'alus'* (refined), Swasthi Bandem elaborated on the postures, gestures and speech patterns laid down for the portrayal of the male/female characters.

Bayu, according to Swasthi, is wind and refers to the God of Wind (Vayuputra?). But it also means energy for it is the altering of the *bayu* that

changes the form of energy. This physiological factor was further elaborated in a demonstration where Ni Made Waratini (Bali) and Azuma demonstrated the *'cras'* and *'alus'* in their own styles. From female-soft/strong to male-soft/strong, the two performers created a thrilling montage of energies in a ceaseless, wordless flow of action.

The Japanese refer to the moment of change as 'going against the heart'. "When you stop to change energy you breathe deeply and hold the breath letting it out gradually", explained Azuma.

Eugenio Barba's observation of this encounter as only understandable through the synaesthetic sense—"I see two women, but, when they change *bayu,* I react in the spine and wonder how they can change so swiftly"—was challenged by Richard Schechner who felt that their ability was closed-room proximity, and should be further analysed in its socio-cultural context.

A Turkish actress and a Canadian modern dance exponent then came on with their own version of the *'alus'* and *'cras'.* The demonstration for all its charged emotion came across as 'aggression' and 'compassion', leading to a debate on 'codification'. Oriental dance theatre, it was felt, has everything to do with codification. They do not have to find a code to conjure emotion. The Occidentals have to conjure emotion and find a code to express it in.

Sankaran's demonstration of Kathakali exercises (with young Vijayakumar) revealed the solid basis of the Kalamandalam training. One saw the ultimate in muscular control and weight balance. *Vayu talluka,* explained Sankaran, "means pushing your *vayu* to the end of the spine, which, in turn, gives one the strength to carry the heavy costume." Elaborating on this concept, Sanjukta pin-pointed the centre of the spine as the point of concentration.

Performing to a common beat, but keeping to their own styles (Odissi and Kathakali), Sanjukta and Sankaran created a string of montages with each, in turn, playing soft and strong male and female roles. The experiment that followed was a significant examination of the form and inspiration of 'energy'. Barba asked Sanjukta to reduce her Pallavi item by 90%. He then handed her a cigarette, then a butcher's knife. The dance was further reduced by 2% as Sanjukta mimed with the objects in hand.

The Pallavi movements were then repeated with Sanjukta seated at a table drinking a glass of water. The rhythm accompaniment continued. This exercise revealed the dancer's ability to maintain the energy level in an alien situation, even when the 'space' was reduced. Barba's contention was that the Occidentals search for energy in the 'space' about them and attribute a specific action to a specific emotion.

Would Sanjukta, however, be able to maintain the psychic state without the help of the codified rhythm, queried an actress? This dialogue between an Occidental director and Oriental actress revealed the danger a performer faces when asked to conform to an alien cultural code. Sanjukta's puppet-like actions showed a draining away of the special energy that draws on the Odissi technique where a balanced weight-distribution of the body, with the feet and legs in communion with the earth, and the thrusting of the body upwards, while retaining the central point of tension at the waist, form a basic essential.

Sanjukta Panigrahi, with 'knife', performing Pallavi.

The five demonstration pieces by the two Chinese (Peking and Hebei Opera) on the penultimate afternoon were masterly expositions and the highpoint of the Congress. Mei-Bao-Jiu, son of Mei-Lan-fang, performed the famous Concubine's Sword Dance and another Tan role, The Drunken Beauty. The sex transformation was complete as it is in the Japanese Onnagata. One glimpsed elements of Kathakali *abhinaya* in Mei's gestures. He later confirmed the relationship of the Peking Opera to 'the temple dance of India', indicating the *tilak* (in male roles) and a small *bindi* as part of this heritage.

Other common factors that emerged were the training in martial arts—Wu Shu (of which Kung Fu is a part) and the importance of the tension in the waist. Pei's expositions of the male warrior (Wu Sheng) left one breathless with awe. It is difficult to imagine any other actress combine physical and vocal energy (she was singing) with the same power and precision.

Amongst the points raised during the following discussions was the relationship between the role, the performer and the psychological preparation. What, for instance, does Pei retain of the female when playing a male? Stressing the importance of continuous training even after thirty years of performing (Pei played at the age of five for the first time), she said besides the basic technique there are definitive codes for each role. An actor cannot apply technique at random. The path has to be chosen after careful study of the character, its mood and psychology so as to create an 'inner life'. According to Pei, there is a saying in China about the actor: "You are you and at the same time you are not".

Mei averred that almost all the gestures for the Tan roles were created by male actors like Mei Lan-fang and deeply appreciated by the females who have built their repertoire around this 200-year old tradition. Man playing woman, it was observed, will construct an image and present the essence of feminity where a woman's presentation may be banal! Both the great interpreters felt that the continuing demand for their art is also due to the fact that 'man is more attractive to woman and vice versa'.

The basic exercises of role construction were demonstrated by the three girls from Taipei. This was helpful in understanding the masterly performances which followed.

Sonja Kehler's exposition of Brecht roles was charged by an electrifying tension. Trained at the Berliner Ensemble, Sonja described her tradition as 'young Socialist' and went on to enact songs from well-known plays. Working solo—her latest work is Rosa Luxemburg—Sonja travels a great deal and has almost stopped doing ensemble work. The enactment of the twin roles Shan Te and Shui Ta from Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* revealed Sonja's power of observation.

Earlier in the week one saw Iben, the only other Occidental, in action. Unlike Sonja, who went to drama school and even resented the regimentation, Iben came to Odin as a drifting drug-addict and revelled in the discipline. One has built an individual style out of traditional learning and the other has broken all rules to create a style for herself. The highlight of Iben's demonstration was her creation of two roles—the 'shaman' who, she says, was not defined in terms of sex and Katrin of *Mother Courage.*

Sonja Kehler of the GDR in Brecht songs.

The last session was devoted to discussions on the preceding representations by the Occidentals and Orientals. "Orientals," said Barba, "go through their training knowing how and what they are going to use it for. Occidentals may go through their training without knowing how it will help in their work. The latter understand 'roles' at an intellectual level, the former do not. I cannot explain the essence it (training plus peformance?) gives but that has to do with energy."

There were many voices speaking on this subject during the last session, which was followed by the final demonstrations by the Odissi team. Guided by Guru Kelucharan, Gautam went through his training exercises. Singing himself, Guruji, then went back in time to his own apprenticeship and delineated the female roles, their construction process and how he came to play them in traditional Krishna Leelas. Sanjukta spoke of her apprenticeship with Kelucharan. "Perhaps why the *'tandava'* is prominent in my dance is because I was the tallest member of the class and was always called upon to play male roles."

The voices, strident, scientific, emotional, analytical, represented involvement. "We are entering the 21st century and there is no culture without the ideological struggle. Techniques of performance should be researched along with the social role and function. By taking on Female Roles, Barba has stepped into politics." (Richard Schechner). "Men and women reach it (optimum level) at the same time and men use more energy to reach it, which is why men have a shorter life. Do Oriental actors live longer than the Occidentals?" (a neuro-psychologist).

"If there is disorientation when you leave, I am happy. It is not a theory we (ISTA) give. Each one must find his own unique theory", concluded Barba.

In addition to the daily eight-hour session of discussions, there were formal evening performances at the Holstebro Halle preceded by dinner and concluded with long informal meetings at the local—believe it or not—Asia Club!

(*The pictures for this contribution are by Torben Huss.*)

—KAVITA NAGPAL

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Book Reviews

BHAONA—The Ritual Play of Assam by Maheswar Neog. Published by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, Rs. 25.00 (*In English*).

From about the fourteenth century onwards several dramatic forms have evolved in various regions in India. One of the reasons for the emergence of these forms was the wave of socio-religious changes that was sweeping across the country. The poet-saints sang of the glory of the Lord and by their religious fervour influenced the people and transformed their lives.

Sankaradev (1449-1568), who was the creator of the Vaishnava dramatic form, the Ankia Nat of Assam, was a remarkable individual who moulded almost the entire region into a homogeneous community following one religion.

He was a widely-travelled man and during his long sojourns he must have met some of the great poet-saints of the time. At Jagannath Puri he met Shri Chaitanyadev, the saint of Bengal. This meeting, perhaps, and the insight which he gained into the teachings of other poet-saints changed his entire life and he became a devout Vaishnava.

To propagate Vaishnavism in Assam he adopted drama as a means of communication and wrote several plays. To achieve his aim, he established the *sattra*-s (monasteries) where the *bhakta*-s (disciples) stayed. They were entrusted with the responsibility of staging the plays. Within the *sattra* complex was constructed the *nam-ghar* or *kirtan-ghar,* where the laity congregated for prayers and also witnessed the plays staged by the *bhakta*-s.

Sankaradev—Mahapurusha as he was known to the Assamese—was a multi-dimensional personality. He provided Assam with translations of religious books, poetry, plays, religious songs and philosophical works. He created a language, Brajabuli, in which he wrote his plays.

Bhaona—The Ritual Play of Assam by the well-known scholar Dr. Maheswar Neog, confines itself to the staging of the Ankia Nat in the *nam-ghar*. It begins by defining the word *bhaona,* which means the 'representation of drama', and terms like *bhawariya* or 'players of individual roles', though in Sankaradev's time they were called *nartaka*-s or *natuwa*-s.

Sankaradev's Vaishnavism was an all-embracing force which unified almost an entire region as can be seen from the following:

किरात, कछारी खासी, गारी, मीरी, यवन, कंक, गोवाल।
असम मलुक, रजक तुरूक, कवँछा, म्लेंच्छ चंडाल।।
आन पापी नर कृस्न सेवा कर संगते पवित्र हय।
भक्ति लभिया, संसार तरिया, बैकुंठ सुखे चलय।।

This example also gives a glimpse into the new language called Brajabuli, which he created for his plays, to give, perhaps, a sanctity to the new language based on and associated with Braja—the birth-place of Krishna.

The booklet describes a typical *nam-ghar* of which there are different shapes and sizes with thatched or tinned gable-roofs. He describes the stage and the 'greenroom'. It is difficult to understand why the word 'greenroom' is used instead of 'dressing room' or *nepathya* and particularly so to a theatre form which has nothing to do with the concept of greenroom.

The *nam-ghar,* where the Ankia Nat is performed is a rectangular structure resting on four or, in some cases, on two rows of pillars in which the central portion is kept wider for staging. The *nam-ghar*-s are walled, but some have *jali*-s at the lower end. This arrangement ensures that the women spectators can see the drama from outside the walled space as the *bhakta*-s are celibates and would not look at women. But there are married *sattradhikara*-s (head-priests) in whose *sattra*-s women are allowed entry in the *nam-ghar.* Some *nam-ghar*-s have temporary bamboo-split barriers which are removed so that larger audiences can be accommodated.

The men in the audience sit on either side between the pillars, with the women sitting in a separate block either inside or outside the *nam-ghar.*

In the central area of the *nam-ghar,* at the western end, is the *thapana* where the sacred *Bhagavata,* or some other poetical work, is placed on a high, often ornated pedestal called the *simhasana.* Beyond the *thapana* is a wall with two doors and behind this wall is a rectangular space called *jagamohan* and lastly in an enclosed room called *manikut* are installed the deities of Krishna, Balaram and other gods.

The eastern end is used as a *cho-ghar*—the *nepathya,* which is curtained off and where the actors dress and do their make-up. It is also used for storing props. In some *nam-ghar*-s, the *cho-ghar* is at some distance away from the main structure.

The booklet also describes the costumes, make-up and masks. *Dhemali* is the preliminary music played before the play starts; the *Sutradhara* begins the play and is present throughout the performance.

This booklet contains a brief description of the staging of the play *Rama-Vijaya* by Sankaradev himself. It may last for an hour or take up the whole night.

The staging of the religious Ankia Bhaona and the secular Bhaona is briefly mentioned. There is also a list of plays based on the *Ramayana, Mahabharata* or other sources. At the end is a glossary of terms and a brief bibliography.

A few suggestions. Some of the photographs (p. 13 and p. 43) are taken in the open. Photographs taken in the *nam-ghar* itself should have been chosen to depict the correct ambiance.

Maheswar Neog's brief, yet lucid exposition of the subject serves as a useful guide towards the understanding of the Ankia Nat of which so little is known outside Assam.

The Sangeet Natak Akademi, we hope, will publish many more such books to help us in acquainting ourselves with the range and variety of the extant regional dramatic forms.

—GOVERDHAN PANCHAL

BHARATANATYAM, THE TAMIL HERITAGE by Lakshmi Viswanathan. Published by Sri Chakra Trust, Madras, 1984, Rs. 125.00 (*In English*).

Bharatanatyam, The Tamil Heritage by Lakshmi Viswanathan deals with Bharatanatyam as the heritage of the Tamils, that has come down to us over the years. It has not been treated in isolation, but as part of the total concept of dance, drama and literature—*Iyal, Isai* and *Natakam* known as *Mutthamizh*. The evolution of this concept of totality is the main thread of thought that runs through and is repeatedly emphasised in this book.

Harking back to the *Tolkappiyam*, the Tamil grammar that sheds light on the early system of music and dance prevailing amongst the Tamils, the author speaks of their forming an integral part of the very lives of the people. The social and cultural ethos was such, that music, dance and literature had a close connection with each other. This still continues to be a significant feature of Bharatanatyam today.

The author then refers to the *Sangam* literary work, *Silapathikaram* by Ilango Adigal, to substantiate the statement that dance at that juncture was of two kinds—secular and devotional, the former being governed by technical norms and performed by professionals and the latter being ritualistic dances of worship. The author has covered areas pertaining to the *Guru* or *Aadal Aasiriyan*, the systematisation of music, the gestures and the various types of dance (*aadal* or *koothu*) performed by Madhavi in this great classic. The inter-relation between music, dance and literature is again brought out, for the *Guru* of dance is portrayed as also being adept in music, languages and literature.

After the *Sangam* era, the author moves on to the Chola period when the ruling class and society in general, influenced by the *Bhakti* Movement of medieval India, gravitated towards the temple. The practice of *devadasi*-s and musicians being attached to almost all temples was a common one. The author stresses that though dance was closely associated with the temple during this period, it was an equally important activity in the court.

Again the concept that dancers also had to know music has been stressed: for they were trained in the inseparably twin art forms of music and dance, enabling

some of them who were senior and older, to provide music and vocal accompaniment to the younger dancers. The duties of the *devadasi*-s and *nattuvan*-s in the temple have found place in the chapter 'Dance and the Temple'. The inscription and practices in the temples at Tanjavur, Kulathur and Tiruvarur have been described by the author.

The next chapter deals with the correlation of dance and the works of the mystic saint-poets. Reference is made to the soul-stirring description of the dance of Nataraja by the Shaivite saints and the devotional lyricism of the Vaishnavite saints. Thirumangai Alwar's contribution, by first using gesture to accompany the singing of the *Divya Prabandam,* thereby planting the seed for the still continuing practice of *Ariyar sevai* in the temples of Srirangam, Alwar Tirunagar and Srivilliputhur, finds mention.

The chapter on dance and sculpture deals with the inter-relation between the two idioms from the early Pallava to Nayak times.

The revival of dance and music under the Nayaks in Tanjavur after the darkness of the Muslim invasion finds pride of place. The Nayak reign witnessed not only a remarkable evolution of dance but also a development of dance music. The contemporary literature of the period in the shape of *kavya* and *nataka* references to musical modes bear witness to this. The contribution of the various rulers of this dynasty in the form of their own works and their patronage of the performing and fine arts and their practitioners, is dealt with in fair detail.

Separate sections deal with the *Bhagavata Melam* and *Kuravanji Natakam.*

The emphasis then shifts to the place of dance and music in the ritual of worship in temples as sanctioned by the *Agama*-s. The actual practice of the ritualistic dances like Kauthvams and Navasandhi are dwelt upon.

Finally, before concluding with her own outlook and attitude towards dance, the author presents an interesting chapter on the position of the *devadasi*-s in society, over the years. In the discussion on the bill to 'prevent dedication of women', introduced in 1927-28 by Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy and the bill becoming law in 1947, the author gives us a thought-provoking picture of both sides of the coin.

Bharatanatyam, The Tamil Heritage, by Lakshmi Viswanathan, is a beautifully brought out publication. An aesthetic and artistic impulse informs the whole project. However, the application in the next edition of a phonetic scheme for spellings would help those not very familiar with Tamil or Sanskrit to pronounce names and terms correctly.

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NRITYA GEETA MALA by Rajee Narayan. Published by Nritya Geeta Mala Publication Committee, Bombay, 1985, Rs. 50.00 (*In English, Hindi, Sanskrit and Tamil*).

There is a vast difference between songs composed for the concert platform and songs written for dance. Over the years a number of the latter have

come down to us, but not all of them have any kind of systematisation and analysis accompanying them.

Nritya Geeta Mala is an anthology that deals specifically with songs suitable for dance. Composed by the dancer, teacher, musician and author, Rajee Narayan, a considerable degree of system has gone into the presentation of these songs. Since Bharatanatyam is being now taught everywhere, the presentation of each composition in three scripts, viz. Tamil, English and Devanagari, is a useful and even unique feature of this book. A detailed word by word gloss with meanings and the correct pronunciation of the lyrics constitute interesting additions.

The twenty-five compositions in Telugu, Tamil and Hindi, comprise an *Alarippu, Jathiswaram*-s, *Shabdam*-s, *Varnam*-s and songs for *abhinaya*. They are based on *Bhakti* and the *Shringara rasa*. The notation of all the songs is provided and they are set in a variety of interesting *raga*-s and *tala*-s. They have been scrutinised by Veena Vidwan, 'Sangeeta Kalanidhi', Sri K. S. Narayanaswamy.

In short, *Nritya Geeta Mala* is not a publication on dance theory; but lends itself to practical application and exposition through the idiom of dance.

—CHITRA VISWESWARAN

SANTAL MUSIC by Onkar Prasad. Published by Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1985, Rs. 180.00 (*In English*).

Dr. Onkar Prasad's work is an important publication which, it is hoped, will prove a harbinger of a welcome trend to include the phenomenon of performance in ethnographic analysis.

The book centres on music of the Santals, numerically the second largest tribe in India with habitations distributed in Assam, Bihar, Meghalaya, Orissa, Tripura and West Bengal (p. 1). Of the twenty-three Santal song-forms reportedly performed, the author has chosen fifty-one specimens of the major sixteen for examination (pp. 4-5). Out of one hundred and thirty-three pages, about eighty-eight are devoted to analysis, a fair percentage by any standard! The specimens are transliterated, translated, notated and the melodic nuclei are tabulated for analytical purposes. A separate chapter (Number Three) is devoted to nine major Santal instruments. In this interesting chapter, descriptions of construction, diagrammatic representations to scale, narrations of the associated myths and references to the acoustical particularities of the instruments are featured. The basic premise of ethnomusicology is that music and culture reflect each other. In order to bring out the relationship, it becomes necessary to range beyond the confines of usually

accepted areas of musical theories. It is also necessary to analyse music of all the four categories, namely, primitive, folk, popular and art. Unfortunately, there is a deplorable lack of discussion of the non-elite music in India. In the light of this background Dr. Prasad's effort assumes significance.

In Dr. Prasad we have an anthropologist turning his equipped eye on a musical phenomenon. The bias is reflected in his work. He is seen to make two types of statements: conceptual and technical or musicological. For example, the following formulations attract attention:

'. . . the purpose has been to examine Santal melodies which are also expected to retain their basic forms in the process of adjustments to the changing socio-cultural and economic conditions.' (p. 2)

'However, it is very difficult to establish as to which of the class-motifs has been emulated by them when and from which community. For, what makes the difference between the melodies of one group of people and a linguistic region and another is the 'vocal mannerism' i.e., the mode of articulation of constituent units (musical notes) of a class-motif.' (pp. 90-91).

'. . . the Santals seem to have left manufacturing the instrument . . . they did it in the process of emulating higher social values.' (p. 94).

'. . . the Santals, however, prefer the high pitch.' (p. 101).

'Moreover, use of one stringed musical instrument by the Santals indicates that they are not sensitive to other intervals of sound available in a multi-stringed musical instrument like *esraj*.' (p. 103).

What is intriguing is that the statements of both the kinds are not substantially argued out to prove the assumptions or conclusions included therein. For example why are the Santals expected to retain the basic melodic forms when they change in other respects? What are the reasons to conclude that vocal sounds (and not sound-timbres in general) are the distinguishing criteria in comparison of melodies of two different groups? In case one-stringed instrument such as the *dhodro banam* is used, how does one deduce user's preference for a high pitch? What is the reference point that all owes a definite statement about a highly relative perceptual phenomenon as pitch? Finally is a preference of many intervals as opposed to a few a criterion of sensitivity? Unless adequate reasoning is put forward Dr. Prasad's conclusions would appear to be deductions from a musicological position heavily biased in favour of art music and all that goes with it.

It also appears that Dr. Prasad fails to make allowance for the fact that the Indian tribal situation (and the Santal situation which is his special study) hardly encourages the assumption that tribes are perfectly isolated, uni-lingual and closed etc. Their exchanges with the non-tribal world have been frequent as well as multi-aspected. One suspects that Dr. Prasad had kept in his mind a classical tribal model and that has kept clouding over the Santal reality which is in fact a folk reality. Consequently Dr. Prasad seems to commit two strategic errors: to lose sight of the special aspects of Indian tribal situation and to mistake a folk for a tribal reality. This is the reason for categorically mixed references to folk as well as tribal features in the text. It is, of course, not suggested that musical categories such as primitive, folk etc. are rigid separations. But each surely has its own distinctive

features. If these are not given weightage they deserve, one is ought to have wrong expectations and questionable answers!

However the most questionable of Dr. Prasad's premises is his faith in A. N. Sanyal's proposed method of analyzing *raga*-s and *ragini*-s according to the relations of consonance and mediance. (pp. 5-91). Sanyal applied his method to *raga*-s and *ragini*-s which are, to say the least, highly processed entities. One is at a loss to know the grounds on which Dr. Prasad avers that 'The method is sound and universally applicable. Hence it can be applied to the analysis of musics of other cultures'. (p. 5). Sanyal's ingenious theoretical construct tries to explain the highly technical and musicological strategies of structuring and elaborating tonal material of Indian art music. To postulate the validity of his approach for non-elite musics without batting an eyelid is to eliminate rigour in research. Dr. Prasad jumps to conclusion in his musical analysis and confuses his categories in musicological examination. This is the reason why one becomes wary of his allusions to musical 'archetypes' among the Santals (p. 115), as also his ambitious statement that '. . . there may be sixteen class focuses corresponding to the sixteen class-motifs of Sanyal (1959) under which each tribe may be grouped' (p. 115).

It seems that the time is not yet ripe for neat ethnomusicological conclusions though there are signs—as in Dr. Prasad's work—of some waking up from ethnomusicological slumber!

—ASHOK D. RANADE

BETWEEN THEATER AND ANTHROPOLOGY by Richard Schechner. Published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, U.S.A., 1985, £35.00 (*In English*).

Wide-ranging and well-documented, written with admirable clarity and obvious enthusiasm, Schechner's *Between Theater and Anthropology* builds a strong case for increased awareness of the analogies and links that exist between the two fields, the interactions that should be explored and perhaps developed further.

Drawing upon his experience as a theater director, Schechner introduces six major points of contact between theater and anthropology: "Transformation of Being and/or Consciousness", "Intensity of Performance", "Audience-Performer Interactions", "The Whole Performance Sequence", "Transmission of Performance Knowledge" and "How Are Performances Generated and Evaluated?" Each of

these points of contact is discussed in the subsequent chapters of the book. Particular emphasis is placed on "performance behaviour"—from ritual to aesthetic theater to sports and on and on. Referring to this complex and fascinating concept throughout his text, Schechner also devotes his longest chapter to performing, defined as "restored behaviour", "twice behaved behaviour", "performing between identities", i.e. "not me—not not me".

The range of vividly evoked, detailed illustrations is immensely stimulating: Deer dance of Arizona Yaqui to Papua New Guinea Mudmen, to Balinese *sanghyang* dancers, to aspects of Noh, or Doris Humphrey's "The Shakers" choreography, to a theme park like Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts, to Schechner's own Performance Group Production of Genet's *The Balcony*, to Squat, a group residing and performing on New York's 23rd Street.

Schechner is at his best sharing his telling accounts of training processes he observed and participated in, as well as performances of traditional theater and dance he attended during his stays in India. Thus his description and assessment of the training at the Kathakali Kalamandalam. Thus the passages devoted to Bhattacharyya's work to restore/recreate Chhau dance. And, above all, the perceptiveness (and love!) of the chapter devoted to the Ramlila of Ramnagar. What makes the records of all these models so revealing is the fact that Schechner finds time for brief but clear comparisons and parallels in each instance. A good example is the juxtaposition of the Ramlila of Ramnagar with that sponsored by the Sankat Mochan temple of Varanasi.

But Schechner does more than develop a persuasive plea for an active interdisciplinary approach. The social aspects—and they are of course, the ultimate *raison d'être* of any performative effort—are never lost sight of. Furthermore, the book's interdisciplinary focus constantly widens into an intercultural spectrum, so vitally needed in today's heterogenous society. In expanding this view, Schechner also brings into proper perspective the importance, the clarity of specific purpose underlying much of the thinking and practice of people like Eugenio Barba or Suzuki Tadashi.

In his opening chapter, Schechner states: "I am far from 'solving' any problem. In fact, my aim is closer to one of deep meditation: a consideration of the talmudic complexity and multivocality of this, that, and another permutation of the performance paradigm." (p. 35). This is indeed one of the chief merits of *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Only in one instance—in his discussion of the Staal-Gardner filming of *Altar of Fire*—does this bracing openness seem to slip somewhat. I have not seen the film and while in full sympathy with Schechner's qualms about exploitation and packaging or overstated claims of authenticity and, in fact, the validity of total reconstruction, the manner in which this project is introduced strikes me as unduly biased and burdened with innuendo. Schechner seems to contradict himself when he writes, after pages largely suggesting reservations against the project: "If I fault Staal and Gardner at all. . . ." (p. 62). This is the only instance in this excellent book where strongly held views prejudice rather than invite zesty controversy.

My reservations are indeed minor. The Index could be improved upon to help the reader, not versed in Asian theatre, keep track more easily of the meaning

of some of the 'foreign' words recurring in the descriptions of performances. As I recall, *"darshan"* is used repeatedly in the riveting account of the Ramlila of Ramnagar before the term gets defined as "a look at the gods" on p. 202.

Also, in so wide-ranging, thought-provoking a discourse, it is hard to resist asking for more. Medieval theatre in Europe, its continuing impact and its various recreations deserve more, perhaps, than one passing reference in a footnote (p. 211). Likewise, opera performance and training and audience response, with all its tensions between tradition, fixed form and innovation, could add a useful further dimension to the discussion.

Between Theater and Anthropology is obviously an important work. In turning over and over points of contact between these disciplines, Schechner constantly deals with broader issues which must concern every practitioner and student of theater anywhere. Awareness of the performative process in its entirety is one such major problem confronting the theater, not in the least in terms of the workshop component of the sequence neglected so often out of economic necessity or because of impatience with self-indulgence or faddism. Equally judicious are Schechner's references to inroads of narcissism as well as to the precarious position of the old master in the Western theater establishment. Above all, one of the invaluable key points Schechner makes is that of narrowly controlled "authenticity" versus syncretic mixing, and a (frequently intercultural) use of traditional forms in modern contexts. He sums up a major premise of his book where he writes: "It's neither possible nor (in my opinion) desirable to keep forms 'pure'. The question is how to manage and whether to limit, the promiscuous mixing of genres." (p. 74).

With this book, Schechner has published a frequently brilliant study of essential "in between" qualities. As they define the nature of all performative behaviour. As they characterize the growing erosion of all disciplines and genres, "doomed by modernization and post-modernization." With the notion of 'liminality' as its bottom-line, the work encourages a heightened sensitivity to an essential quality of 'threshold' in life-and-art—in all of our existence, in fact. This, in turn, could eventually lead to a desire to shape one's own distinctions and perhaps define anew, for oneself, a concept of and a purpose for 'art', providing terms are meant to have any meaning at all. High praise indeed for Schechner's beautifully intelligent and provocative *Between Theater and Anthropology*.

—WALTER EYSSELINCK

Henri Cartier-Bresson: IN INDIA. Foreword by Satyajit Ray. Introduction by Yves Véquaud. Published by Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., Ahmedabad, in association with Mapin International Inc., New York, 1987, Rs. 450.00 (*In English*).

Henri Cartier-Bresson's Photo-Book "IN INDIA", the publishers say, "is the record of the French photographer's fascination with India over half a lifetime." It is a fascination which is instantly transmitted to the reader, or rather viewer of this magnificent album, spanning 40 years of independent India's history from 1947-1986.

In 105 black and white photos of sustained beauty and power, Cartier-Bresson paints a portrait of India that is—at the same time—poetic and real, topical and timeless. Cartier-Bresson's canvas is as wide as India, from the mountains of Kashmir to the coast of Kerala, from rural villages in the Punjab to bustling street scenes in Ahmedabad or building workers at Trombay.

Always, however, the photographer's main focus is on people—in fact there are a mere 3 pictures among the 105 where sheer geometric form seduced Cartier-Bresson to press the trigger—and he captures the people of India in all their moods. Mainly he portrays the ordinary people in their ordinary everyday pursuits—the farmers, fishermen, artisans, traders and women at the market. But Cartier-Bresson the news-photographer also confronts us with people in extreme situations and with the rich and mighty from Lord Mountbatten and the Maharajas to Panditji and Indira Gandhi.

There are scenes from Partition and—most stirring of all—a 16-picture sequence of Gandhiji's last fast and his death and funeral after the assassination.

Whatever he portrays, the power of his images is such that we become not only onlookers but intimate witnesses. One cannot see these pictures without being touched and feeling the breath of history breathing down one's neck.

Satyajit Ray—who fittingly wrote a brief Foreword to this volume—has this to say about Cartier-Bresson's magic: "Here is a new way of looking at things—the eye seeking the subject matter and, at the same time, its most expressive disposition in geometrical terms within the conventional rectangle of the photographic space. The style is unique in its fusion of head and heart, in its wit and its poetry."

Cartier-Bresson in fact does with people what Anselm Adams does with his trees and landscapes, namely—in Ray's words—"to raise the ordinary and the ephemeral to a monumental level" and one finds no difficulty in agreeing with the great Indian film-maker's verdict of Cartier-Bresson as "the greatest photographer of our time".

Production of this beautifully printed and bound volume does full justice to its contents and makes this book a must for any lover of photography and India.

An essay on Hinduism by the French author Yves Véquaud is included in the book for the benefit of foreign readers, who—according to Cartier—may be "unreceptive to the philosophy which underlies a world very different from our own". It may be skipped by the Indian reader, but even if read will not offend.

—JAN FRIESE

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