

TRADITIONS OF INDIAN FOLK DANCE by Kapila Vatsyayan, Indian Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, Rs. 60.00 (*In English*).

The activities of the human being in a continuous pattern, through time, become its culture. Spontaneous gestures and movements in certain structural designs soon become a form of dance. In India, the inner rhythm of the spirit of man and its outer symbolism in the arts have through the centuries been of great significance in the development of art forms.

Creativity whether in dance, music or painting was thought of as a gift of the Gods. The expression of it was man's ability to link himself with this great power that pervaded the universe. All dance became prayer, both supplication and thankfulness, two aspects of the human being and his relation of God, whether through the abundant richness of Nature or through the stark simplicity of his own existence. The dance of the people was woven into the fabric of everyday living but it kept reinforcing the sense of total harmony.

The *drishtam*, that which is seen and the *adrishtam*, that which is not seen, in dance communication brought about a wholeness that spoke of the joy and the tribulations of daily life.

Form became a need rather than a selected design. Later the classical and folk separated into distinct techniques, the *margi* and *desi*. As a symbol the circle has always been synonymous with a feeling of fullness, harmony, communication and interdependence. There is the centre of our being, the central vision, the centre of the universe. In many of the dances the centre is a lamp, the flame of illumination around which life revolves. Krishna, symbolically the light of spiritual power, is the centre and 'shines like the full moon surrounded by the stars' in many of the group dances. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan tells us of variations of design in the traditional folk dance.

"Intricate geometrical patterns are drawn: some are used to bring a magical power on the earth. . ." The designs are "the mandala, the swastika, the square, the rectangle, the inverted pairs of triangles, the inter-twined serpent", all suggesting 'the deepest spiritual beliefs of the people'. She has ably codified the categories of dance forms including some of what may be called classical today, like the Lai — Haroba of Manipur. As she herself says, "we realise the inadequacy of following simple models of classification of Indian artistic traditions into folk and classical, high and low, Sanskritised and vernacular, 'great' and 'little'..."

The book is a description of dance traditions as they exist today in the backdrop of the Indian scene. The study pin-points the names, the structural form, the historical and geographical environment of these traditions and is an excellent and valuable scholastic work.

Yet the involvement, the emotional experience, the interaction of man and mood, which is the essence of folk art, is missing. Dance was and

always has been a basic need of the human being. Movement and life possess a oneness in folk dancing which reflects both tradition and dynamic change, the social processes emerging as dance expression. This aspect is reflected in the songs of the folk and we would wish that a few more could have been added in the book to give it the colour and vividness of folk imagination and longing.

Watching the dance movements of a variety of groups, from rich folklore areas like Kutch, one is aware of the socio-religious content of the development of the dance as set within the framework of history and custom. The Brahmin, the Kshatriya and the Harijan dance in body movement that is literally a psychological study of their way of life, their values and their sufferings. The direct experience is hard to convey except perhaps through photographs and films. It is in an atmosphere of creativity, of momentary revelation that real folk dance and music exist, in spite of the basic norms.

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan traces the origin of each dance form with its ritualistic and devotional background. This is a tremendous task and she has done it with knowledge and dedication. However a few misinterpretations have crept in. The Garba for instance does not revolve around hunting nor is it an agricultural ritual. It is a dance performed during Navaratri and with slight variations on Sharad Purnima, Vasant Panchami and other festival days. It is a fertility dance and the 'garbhadeep' symbolises embryonic life. The worship is to Shakti as the Mother Goddess Amba Mata, and the cult must have existed even before the Aryan invasion. In order to conceive a child women danced the Garba at the shrine of Shri Krishna at Dwaraka as a religious ritual.

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan has covered the vast panorama of our folk traditions. Her scholarship is remarkable and this admirable book helps the reader to understand better the many facets of our heritage.

— MRINALINI V. SARABHAI

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MEE — ISADORA (*My Life* by Isadora Duncan). Translated by Rohini Bhate, Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal, Bombay, 1975, Rs. 39.00 (*In Marathi*).

Towards the beginning of this century Isadora Duncan (1878-1927) liberated dance from the clutches of ballet shoes and corsets and danced barefoot all over Europe and America. She overwhelmed the artists and art-lovers of her time with the spontaneity and grace of her dance. Isadora Duncan is an important landmark in the history of dance. Her memoirs, *My Life*, are as free, frank and spontaneous as was her dance. Rohini Bhate manages to convey the easy flow of the original in her Marathi translation of *My Life*.