

Book Reviews

Ashok Da Ranade

(Published in Sangeet Natak, No 120, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Mumbai, Apr-June 1996)

BOOK REVIEWS

Music Research: Perspectives and Prospects

(Edi.) R.C. Mehta
Indian Musicological Society,
Baroda, 1995
92 pages, Rs 150

Directory of Doctoral Theses in Music

(Edi.) R.C. Mehta
Indian Musicological Society,
Baroda, 1995
74 pages, Rs 150

The two publications under review are obviously related. One is a collection of diverse presentations on perspectives and prospects in music research, the other is a directory of doctoral theses in Indian music in Indian and foreign universities. The first is expected to provide fresh ideas about what music-related research should achieve! Both are edited by Prof. R.C. Mehta.

In her prefatory remarks to *Music Research*, Dr. Premlata Sharma interestingly observes that newness has traditionally never been the crux of research in India, unlike in modern days (p. 1). Obviously, the view is based on the fact that textual commentaries and interpretations of seed-texts far outnumber research works which are not so described. However, the observation is more interesting than convincing, because this kind of closed definition of newness allows no role to conceptual research! The ground is, however, firmer when she states that music research in the modern sense has a history of only about four decades in Indian universities. She makes valid points about evolving a suitable methodology to deal with oral tradition (p. 2). The desirability of intensive study of song-corporuses is well noted (p. 3). Her remarks about the futility of categorizing music as tribal, folk, etc., may not stand scrutiny because structural and qualitative, and therefore experiential, differences in these musics rebel against identical research frameworks, conceptual complexes and treatments, whether in research or performance.

Bimal Mukherjee's short presentation foresees more and more experiments in orchestral and choral music as also the need to research into these possibilities (pp. 13-14). Geeta Mayor argues that the raga-idea has the potential of remaining constant and yet allowing innovations (p. 17). S.A.K. Durga covers established ground while outlining the ethnomusicological perspective in music research (pp. 20-29). Shakuntala Narsimhan raises some refreshingly new questions by pointing to a pattern in Hindustani borrowings of Carnatic ragas (pp. 30-33). In a brief analysis she enumerates how from the 72 melas and the 12 chakras of the Southern system, ragas from chakras 3, 4, 5, 10 and 11 alone are borrowed by Hindustani musicians. She concludes by attributing subjectivity to the process, but it is clear that she has touched upon an important research theme. Arvind Parikh and Arvind Mulgaonkar make similar points about music researches to be carried out in Sitar and Tabla respectively (pp. 34-35). S.S. Haldankar stresses the necessity of standardization of ragas - an age-old theme tackled by many from Pandit Bhatkhande onwards. While his position on concentrating on performance in the presence of an audience is valid, the rest of his statement about how to carry out the research falls between two stools - of following a lab model and/or relying on performance as an act (pp. 46-52). He is neither clear about the experimental mode he wants to set up to examine the mood-music relationship, nor does he show an awareness of the criticism of the inadequacy of Dr Deva's early research model (which Haldankar refers to) in this respect. G. H. Tarlekar's remarks on the 'researchal' significance of Sanskrit texts on music (pp. 53-59) are confined to emphasizing the utility of ancient texts to bring out the historical perspective of music in India.

Perhaps the most well-wrought paper in the collection is by Subhadra Chaudhary on the tala aspect of Indian music. In a limited span (pp. 60-69), she touches on many important themes related to tala. Beginning by distinguishing between *margi* and *deshi* talas, she draws attention to the early and closer connection between prosody and music in matters of temporality. Further, she notes the gradual change in the connections of terminology formulated in the traditional dashaprāna concept. She does not overlook the essentially different approach revealed in the Manipuri and, to some extent, Odissi tālas. She would have done well to dwell longer on the different expressions or manifestations of the tāla philosophy necessitated by differences in performing preferences for specific timbres in different historical periods. Sitanshu Ray's observations on the importance of Tagore's remarks (stray as well as more sustained) on music are valid, but he fails to focus on the reasons why Tagore on music can be instructive as well as provocative (pp. 70-73). N. C. Khandekar's presentation gives some idea of work being done on simulation of Indian ragas. He rightly points out that the activity is, as yet, a virgin field in India (pp. 74-85). Suvarnalata Rao's plea for

proper recognition of research per se is likely to touch sympathetic strings in many hearts in India (pp. 86-89)!

Taken together, the collection does not engross or enthuse the reader and leaves one wondering whether it is beneficial to treat isolated ideas as academic presentations!

The second publication is a directory and thus has a different utility. Covering the period from 1950 to 1993, it affords a glimpse of post-independence attitudes and concerns in music research in universities. The editor's admitted failure to include research done in 'deemed' universities is certainly a serious shortcoming as the number of these researches is considerable and one may find a listing instructive. The data-gathering lacks meticulousness - many details are missing, in too many places. The editor rightfully refers to difficulties faced while eliciting correct information from the sources themselves!

All those familiar with the Indian university scene in doctoral research in the performing arts are aware of the extremely uneven standards at every level. One can only commiserate with the editor! Not much editorial input is revealed in this book - apart from university-wise chronological listings of scholars registered for research in Indian universities, a rather simplified growth index of such studies, and information on doctoral studies at universities abroad.

Comments on the most favoured themes, language biases, or preferred periods, etc., could have helped in showing a pattern in research activity in Indian music.

Both the publications could have been subjected to more rigorous proof-reading!
