

Book Review

Brihaddeshi of Matanga Muni

Ashok Da Ranade

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BRIHADDESHI OF SHRI MATANGA MUNI edited by Prem Lata Sharma and assisted by Anil Bihari Beohar. Published by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in association with Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, Rs. 275.00 (In English).

Dr. Prem Lata Sharma who has been rightfully awarded a Fellowship by the Sangeet Natak Akademi for her musicological achievements has aroused great academic expectations by bringing out the first volume of the proposed three-volume edition of *Brihaddeshi* by Matanga Muni. *Brihaddeshi*, unlike *Natyashastra*, is solely devoted to music. Secondly, it deals with the secular and regional traditions of ancient music in contrast with Kohala's *Dattilam* which focussed on margi music representing the sacred stream of music in the early India. Even though the sacred-secular demarcations became blurred over the ages, they were musical realities at one point of time and continued to have influence on the later centuries. Hence the relevance of studying classics such as Matanga Muni's.

In the absence of complete and numerous manuscript-sources, Dr. Sharma has been compelled to accept the challenging task of reconstructing the entire text by collating citations of *Brihaddeshi* scattered in works spread over a period of nearly eight centuries. Dr. Sharma has borne the responsibility in the proven tradition of textual criticism.

The first volume covers the first chapter of *Brihaddeshi* dealing with the seminal themes identified in the scholastic tradition as Desi, Nada, Sruti, Svara, Gramamurchana, Varna-alankara and Padagiti. In the volume, variants are carefully noted, sources are meticulously indicated, inevitable additions marked off, thematic regrouping is carried out wherever essential, prose-portions are split contextually, diagrammatic presentations are improved upon and translation is undertaken with rare intellectual rigour. Dr. Sharma has also taken a pre-emptive step in cautioning critics of

the translation-aspect by stating that her attempt is to "bring the original to the reader with its flavour and nuances" (p. xiii). As the editor's critique is to follow in the final volume, the present volume can hardly be reviewed properly. However certain observations may be made, if only to indicate how successfully Dr. Sharma's effort provokes one to think about a masterpiece.

In some places Dr. Sharma's translation displays a kind of looseness of texture. For example the words in the editor's version (given in bold by the reviewer) do not have a matching word in the original:

- "... the **intense** course of nada." (p. 7)
- "... the **beautiful** origin of nada." (p. 9)
- "... in **steps** of a ladder-like smoke ..." (p. 9)
- "... The prastara (**chart**) ..." (p. 17)
- "... the **refutation** of (these) alternative(s)." (p. 19)
- "... demonstrate with prastara (**visual representation**)." (p. 25)
- "... It produces the **ragatva** of raga." (p. 33)
- "... tana-vidhana (**performance** of tanas) ..." (p. 81)
- "... sthavin (**steady**) ." (p. 85)
- "... **constructors**..." (ref. geetyojaka) ..." (P·89)
- "... prastaras (**notational representations**).." (p. 115)

In a couple of places terms are not translated i.e. they are omitted:
dooshanan (p. 18), koshta (p. 54), pavananiroddhen (p. 92), urogata (p. 108)
and kanthe (p. 108).

I could detect only one printer's oversight! (tattya instead of tatva-p. 123).

Brihaddeshi excites because it is lucid and grapples with the issues without wasting verbiage! It will be instructive to read Dr. Sharma's critique and especially her reasoned answers to some of the queries which the first volume suggests. For example:

1. What, according to *Brihaddeshi*, was the logical sequence in the chain leading to vowels and consonants from bindu?
2. What was the relationship between the views on sound propounded by the grammarian--philosophers in India and *Brihaddeshi*?
3. To what extent the human voice and voice-production (as contrasted with vina and vina-music) were held to be coextensive with music as a totality and why?

4. Is it possible to account for the differences of interpretation between Bharata (whom *Brihaddeshi* quotes) and Matanga - especially in respect of the alankara-s?
5. Why Matanga falls back repeatedly on 'uncommonness' as a distinguishing criterion in contexts of musical phenomena?

The third volume of *Brihaddeshi* is surely and eagerly awaited!
