

## INDIA, NEPAL

EMMERT, RICHARD, HASUMOTO IZUMI, KATSUSHITA HITOSHI and OKADA MAKI, eds. *Dance and Music in South Asian Drama. Chhau, Mahākālī Pyākhan and Yakshagāna*. Report of Asian Traditional Performing Arts 1981. Tokyo: Academia Musica, Ltd., 1983. Xx+354 pp., including notes appendices, bibliography, over-sized foldout, and index: numerous photographs, drawings, maps, diagrams and charts. Yen 13,000.

In 1981 the Japan Foundation sponsored the third, and most ambitious, of a series of projects under the Asian Traditional Performing Arts (ATPA) Program aiming to encourage the mutual understanding and appreciation of musical traditions found in different Asian nations. This project was designed to document and analyze three dance-drama traditions of India, using modern sophisticated technology, a broad spectrum of research methodology and a large team of specialists representing a variety of disciplines, including both scholars and artists from both countries. Public performances in various parts of Japan were included as an integral part of the project, but the documentation also included extensive field work and filming of live performances in India. The subjects of this effort were *Chhau* (represented by variants from the town of Seraikella in Bihar and the district of Purulia in West Bengal) of Eastern India, *Yakshagāna* of Southern India, and *Mahākālī Pyākhan* of Kathmandu, Nepal. These traditions arguably represent three forms of a single, widespread genre of folk performance found in many areas of South Asia. The potential for solid comparative analysis and generalization was obvious, although, interestingly, the Supervisory Committee also regretfully notes that ". . . by omitting totally Japanese performing arts, perspectives for comparison were inevitably narrowed" (vi). The project itself was an impressive achievement of Japanese and Indian cooperation and a milestone in the study of Indian performing art traditions.

The present book is a report on the various dimensions of the project and a presentation of some of the scholarly achievements and research activities which the project inspired. No doubt, for those who were involved in the project, the report falls short of reflecting the tremendous impact the project had on them, but for those who missed the project altogether, the book is a valuable document of this momentous event.

The book is divided into three sections and a set of extensive appendices.

The first section consists of a brief introduction to each of the performance traditions as well as a listing of each of the performers and the items each troupe performed.

The second section is a transcription of a set of six seminars based on the performance traditions. It appears, however, that the seminar sessions took place before all of the participants had had the occasion to see a live public performance. In four of the sessions, a single tradition is first described and discussed by an Indian "commentator." Each of these presentations is followed by a question and answer period. The commentators—Narayana Singh Deo (Seraikella *Chhau*); Asutosh Bhattacharyya (Purulia *Chhau*) Shivaram Karanth (*Yakshagāna*), Kamar Prasad Darshan (*Mahākālī Pyākhan*)—differ considerably in their capacity to provide useful information on their respective traditions. While the transcription no doubt accurately portrays the verbal exchange which took place, it cannot, of course, capture the ambiance of the presentations and the visual information conveyed by dance demonstrations to which each of the commentators frequently referred. For the printed report, transcripts of these presentations are not especially valuable and the volume might have been better served if papers based on the presentations, but written especially for the publica-

tion, were substituted for the presentations themselves.

The seminars also included two sessions of a more general nature, during which panel participants and commentators discussed a wide range of topics of mutual interest. These two sessions are remarkably candid and fascinating to follow. Their inclusion in the book is most rewarding, although at first reading these sessions may seem rather rambling. I suspect the rambling nature of the seminars is because the participants not infrequently converse at cross purposes. From an outsider's perspective, I wondered whether commentators and panelists really understood each others' questions and answers, or whether it was I who couldn't understand. I wondered how satisfied the seminar participants were with the exchange.

In part, I think the discussion floundered on around certain differences in the relationship and the involvement which the participants had toward the traditions themselves. It was not until the end of the seminar that the participants began to realize these differences deeply influence all discussion of folklore. (For a paradigm through which to understand this, the article by Yamaguchi in the next section is useful.) For example, in the final session, it is clear that the Indian participants were not content to simply observe and analyze the ongoing developments in their cultural traditions, but were concerned with maintaining the purity and integrity of the arts in the face of incursion from modern popular tastes and commercial interest. (See e.g., the comments by Karanth, p. 56.) The Japanese participants at first were less moved by these concerns than they were with the attempt to compare the traditional folk performances in different Asian cultures, especially those of Japan. The initial assumption here must surely have been what was viewed as indeed a traditional folk performance. We then share with the Japanese scholars a certain amount of surprise when we learn that the Indian scholars, who insist that they strive for a strict adherence to tradition, at the same time had been instrumental in altering the performances for suitable presentation in urban settings and for international audiences. Indeed, one of the discoveries we share with the seminar participants is that the performances are no longer to be regarded as strictly folk traditions since they have been deeply influenced under the kindly auspices of governmental and scholarly support. It is at this point we begin to ponder the impossibility of experiencing truly traditional folk performances outside their natural settings and away from their indigenous audiences. Even documentary films have their limitations in this regard, as is insightfully pointed out by Nakagawa and Yamada in a paper in the next section of the book. What is it, then, which we experience through the ATPA project—a traditional folk drama, or an illusion of that?

The third section of the book—constituting approximately half its volume—consists of individual research papers. These are extremely varied in size, subject matter and sophistication of treatment. The authors themselves range from performing artists to scholars and technical analysts. There are papers from both Japanese and Indian researchers. It would be impossible for this reviewer to provide an adequate and balanced coverage of the entire set of eighteen papers. I will instead simply list the topics covered by the various authors and single out a few for some brief comment.

A number of the papers (Okuyama, Bhatt, Bhattacharyya, Ishii, Karanth) present an overview of one or another of the traditions and provide essential information on the social and cultural background which have fostered them. One paper (Awasthi) provides an excellent overview of dance drama traditions throughout India which gives the reader a sense of the multitude from which were drawn the traditions contained within the book. Remarkably, of all of the papers in the volume, only one, by Honda,

specifically attempts to compare Indian and Japanese folk drama traditions and only one of the papers (by Konishi, below) takes full advantage of the unique opportunity of viewing this group of Indian dance traditions together and undertaking a serious comparison of them.

Many of the remaining papers deal with technical aspects of one or more of the traditions. There are two papers on masks and costuming (Konishi and Minegishi). Three papers deal with movement (Singh Deo, Ohtani and Matsumoto). Two of these are of particular interest, with one of them (Singh Deo) giving a folk, or "emic," description and classification of poses and gestures making reference to a rare set of folk drawings of each gesture discussed. In the other (Matsumoto), an analytic model of some of the same gesture and movement sequences is looked at in relation to the thoroughly "etic" use of a film motion analyzer—a machine originally designed for tracing the trajectory of aircraft! Three papers concern musical aspects of the traditions (Hasumoto, Rao, and Tokumatsu). Of these, the paper by H. Gopala Rao, a renowned drum master and performer himself, is of special interest because it is the only analysis of Yakshagāna *maddla* rhythms—and a superbly complete one at that—available in print.

The three concluding papers by Nakagawa and Yamada, Tsuge and Yamaguchi are somewhat difficult to assess in that they review the present project against the backdrop of earlier Asian Traditional Performing Arts projects. Each of these papers arrives at useful insights into the design and execution of the largescale research and study efforts as this represents. The paper by Nakagawa and Yamada provides some cautionary remarks on the use of film in ethnomusicological research. Film-making has many limitations which an audience might not be aware of because of the apparent realistic nature of the media. Tsuge's paper reminds us that Asian countries have been so greatly influenced by the arts of Western cultures that they have paid too little attention to each other's traditions. It is from within this context that we must view the tremendous efforts of the ATPA and appreciate the numerous functions which its projects are expected to fulfill.

The six appendices in section Four are a valuable portion of the book. The first consists of a photographic presentation of masks used in the Purulia and Seraikella forms of Chhau and in Māhākālī Pyākhan. This is followed by a short series of photographs showing how the masks of the two Chhau versions are made. The third appendix is a long (49 pages) descriptive catalogue of each of the musical instruments used in all of the dance drama forms discussed in the book. Each instrument is photographed in use and described and discussed in terms of its etymology, construction, use, playing technique, and distribution. The compilers of this appendix deserve our praise for their attention to detail and thoroughness. The fourth appendix is a short paper comparing the construction and sound quality of the double reed instruments found in the three northern drama traditions. A more interesting contribution would have been made if the author had correlated these differences with the functional use of the instrument in the different traditions, and perhaps speculated on the reason for its absence in Yakshagāna. The fifth appendix is a transliteration and translation of the text of the two Yakshagāna dramas, Abhimangu (a 17th century play based on a story from the Mahabharata) and Panchavati (a 16th century play from the Ramayana), presumably from printed texts. The final appendix is a labanotation of the Mayur dance of the Seraikella form of Chhau. It is a bit puzzling why only this dance is treated in this way and included in the text.

The bibliography and several other details of editing and publishing this book deserve notice and praise. The bibliography is an extensive and fairly thorough survey

of the literature on South Asian dance drama traditions, especially concerning the traditions covered in the book. It also contains items useful for understanding the historical and cultural background and setting for each of the regions in which the traditions are found. As a thoughtful touch, each citation is marked as to which tradition it is most relevant, or whether it pertains to general information.

The lavish use of fine color and black/white photographs—nearly 250!—enriches all aspects of the publication and our own appreciation of the traditions. Equally well done are the numerous line drawings and graphics. A final touch in this regard is the delightfully informative fold-out located near the back cover of a cosmological and geneological map of the Hindu pantheon.

The overall effect of this multimedia, multidimensional project is very impressive. While one could enumerate shortcomings in the individual research contributions or take note of the ineffectiveness of some of the seminar discussion, when we take everything together and in perspective, we cannot fail to recognize it as one of the most important steps taken thus far in Asian folklore studies. The book itself is not only a research report, but a useful source for further research.

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