TRADITIONAL PERFORMING ARTS THROUGH THE MASS MEDIA IN INDIA

Material and studies for this publication were prepared for UNESCO within its cultural development programme. Publication has been undertaken by the Asian Cultural Documentation Centre for UNESCO (Teheran), in agreement with UNESCO. Opinions expressed in the signed studies are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNESCO or the Centre. *All rights are reserved.*

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MUSIC AND THE MASS MEDIA

by

Narayana Menon

I

Of the most significant types of Performing Arts in India, music has a place of pre-eminence. This is probably because, as Walter Pater said, all the arts aspire to the condition of music. This means a condition of abstraction. The famous and oft-quoted story of the King who asked a great sage to teach him how to make sculptures of the Gods and was told that he had to start with vocal music is really a reaffirmation of this. Vocal music is the source and goal of all the arts, the sage convinced the King.

Indian music has a long and sustained history behind it. It is an amalgam of various strains and traditions, of which the oldest must surely be the tradition native to the land, the Dravidian tradition. Into this has been absorbed other traditions and styles which came from outside the country. As a well-known scholar has put it: "The successive waves of poeples who have flowed into this sub-continent over some six thousand years ..... bringing their own music with them, have made India a vast compound of musical lore into which its age-long tradition of classical music has frequently and abundantly dipped". But however numerous these influences,

Indian music kept its identity. I am reminded of the famous words of Gandhiji who once said: "I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible, but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them".

The recognisable patterns of Indian music with an identity of its own can be traced to the Vedic days, though history and facts and legend are all inextricably mixed into one. There are many symbolic legends of music. The seven notes of the scale and the basic rhythms are supposed to have been revealed by the Lord himself. Singing and dancing exemplify His various forms. Some of the early musical literature are in the nature of minor but significant scriptures. Early songs embody philosophical concepts, ethical and moral precepts and discussions and social criticism. It is only natural that such an art should have grown and developed as an adjunct of worship and that temples and other places of worship should have been the biggest repositories of music and the dance.

The history of this music has to be studied and understood not so much in terms of the music itself, but through various treatises which have come down to us. The main landmarks — at least until recent times — were not the great composers or their works, but treatises like the *Natya Sastra* of *Bharata* (circa 4th century A.D), the *Sangita-Ratnakara* of Sarangadeva (circa 13th century), the *Swara-mela-Kalanidhi* of *Ramamatya* (16th century) or the *Chatur-dandi-Prakasika* of Venkatamakhi (17th century). These embody extant knowledge and are in the nature of codifications of current theory and practice. There are dozens of such texts which are authentic and authoritative and are excellent indices to the development of the art.

In the pattern of this culture, music and the dance, the visual arts and poetry are all governed by the same attitudes.

Indian music bears the same relationship to Western music as Indian dancing does to Western ballet, or for that matter, much the same sort of relationship as Indian literature does to that of Europe, or traditional Indian art to European art. In all these, the insistence is on emotional sincerity rather than on intellectual sincerity; on the lyrical impulse rather than on the dramatic; on contemplation rather than on action. The result is a subjectivism which is opposed to Western objectivism.

This tradition has to be understood in the context of Indian life and thought. Its present theory and practice are the logical development of a consistent process, a process which has been distinctive and which is an integral part of Indian history and culture. To listen to Indian music and judge it in terms of Western music or some other system will mean missing the point and reaching absurd conclusions.

The most distinctive characteristic of this music is that it is purely melodic. I mean by pure melody, a melodic line that neither needs nor implies harmony. Harmony affects the structure of melody itself, and it has become almost impossible for the Westerner to conceive of melody without the implications, tacit or explicit, of a harmonic system. In Western music, a melodic line is really the top or surface line of a carefully constructed harmonic srtucture. Thus, in the building up of melody, the harmonic implications of substantive and passing notes, and the relationship of these play an important part. Also, Western melody has a tendency to develop round notes which are harmonically related to the tonic. Indian melody is made up of notes which are related purely by their continuity. If this melody sounds exotic to the Western ear, it is probably because the West has lost the ear for pure melody and cannot take in melody neat as it were. Our use of "quarter-tones" is also relevant here. There is no such thing in Indian music as an exact quarter-tone, such as those used by Alois Haba or

Bloch. But we do use in certain *ragas* sharps which are sharper than the sharps of the diatonic scale and flats which are flatter. Tovey once said that the just intonation of a Wagner opera would need some 1,000 notes to the scale. It is not the number of notes we use that is important. The important thing is how small an interval is of direct use and interest to us.

There is no absolute pitch in Indian music. This is, of course, because it does not concern itself with harmonic draughtsmanship, and, consequently, does not need such a stable standard. The melody usually centres round the tetrachord, often within it, and swings on two marked pivots — the tonic and the fourth or the fifth. This would suggest a harmonic potentiality, if not a latent harmonic sense. The *Raga* (mode) is the basis of melody. There are seventy-two fully septatonic *ragas*, the *sampurnas* or *melakartas* as they are called. In all these the fifth is constant; thirty-six have true fourths, thirty-six augmented fourths. This represents the maximum possibilities of a comparatively modern system of classification prevalent in the South. There are several derivative *ragas*, some pentatonic, some sextatonic. About four hundred of these are more or less in actual use. Accidental notes are rare, but where used, they are an integral part of the *raga*.

Rhythm is assymmetric as well as symmetric. Often a bar is made up of 4 + 2 + 2, the Carnatic *Adi Tala*. Variations of time *(tala)* do not proceed in geometric progression. A variation of the time measure given above will be 5 + 2 + 2 or 3 + 2 + 2. There are accented and unaccented parts of a bar. Thus in the *adi tala* of eight bars, the first, fifth and seventh are strongly accented. All these permutations and combina ions are possib'e in Indian music, because, again, it is not forced to accept symmetries of rhythm which harmonic planning necessitates.

The South and the North agree on fundamentals though the nomenclature both of *ragas* and *talas* differs. North Indian music popularly known as Hindusthani music, and South Indian music popularly known as Carnatic music are like two branches of the same tree. The roots are the same, even the leaves and the flowers are exactly the same. That is, both schools have the same origin and look to the same authority; both try to achieve the same. Only the approaches, the styles are different. It is inevitable that any tradition practised and developed over an area as immense as that of the sub-continent of India over a period of some two thousand years with varying contacts and influences should develop indigenous styles and schools. Indian dancing has similarly developed various styles and schools from Manipur to Kerala all of which still look to texts like the *Natya Sastra* for their true authority.

It is difficult to say exactly when and how the two main schools crystallised. This will be an interesting study for musicologists and historians. One thing is true. Our earliest treatises on music do not make any distinction between any Northern and Southern schools. The nomenclature of *Ragas* and *Talas* were of universal application. But today the same name may mean two totally different *ragas* or *talas* in the North and the South. *Bhairavi,* for instance, means something quite different in the North and the South; or the *tala Roopak.*

Of many significant factors which have been at the back of this bifurcation, that of Islam (and of Persian music) is perhaps the most obvious. Amir Khusru, the Persian poet, musician and composer who came to India and adorned the Court of Allaudin Khilji (12th century A.D.) was responsible for many innovations in style which not only left permanent marks on current practices but which blossomed forth into unsuspected channels and musical forms. He introduced Persian *maqams* to India, invented new instruments, transformed exist-

ing ones and changed the whole concept of theory and practice. There were other sociological factors such as the impact of Islam on Hindu art, of Moslem musicians interpreting and developing Hindu concepts. All this was confined to the North. The South was left untouched by the new influences and the new personalities, and developed the traditional art along its own lines.

It is this long continuity of growth that is the most remarkable thing about Indian music. Even before the Christian era it had developed not only definite laws of theory and practice, but even comprehensive theories of appreciation. Ancient Indian texts describe music as a type of activity, a statement governed by a *rasa. Rasa* means flavour, that which gives character to a work of art and determines its quality. The nine primary *rasas* are: *Sringara* (love), *vira* (heroism), *bibhatsa* (disgust), *raudra* (anger), *hasya* (mirth), *bhayankara* (terror), *karuna* (compassion, pity), *adbhuta* (wonder), and *Santa* (peace, tranquillity). In addition to these primary *rasas,* there are transient or 'subordinate' *rasas* like joy, impatience.

The ancient scholars studied carefully the physical stimulants to aesthetic enjoyment. They analysed the nature of emotion; the conditions and themes which produce the emotions; the visible signs and results of such emotions; and even the nature of the sub-conscious mind, the involuntary emotions. Their methods were rational and, what is more, they put their conclusions to good practical use. The Greeks did this on a small scale. They realised, for instance, that the Doric mode was dignified and manly, and taught the Spartan boys nothing else. They were careful of the use of the Lydian mode which they thought voluptuous, licentious and orgiastic. Strabo, the Greek philosopher, may have been thinking of this when he acknowledged the debt of Greek music to India.

In the highest concept of art, religion and art are synonymous. This would be in accordance with the rationale of a society which was in the main hieratic. A song is a *yantra,* an apparatus of worship to achieve identical consciousness in worshipper and the deity. Some of the texts were very explicit and went so far as to say: "By clearly expressing the *rasa,* and enabling men to taste thereof, it gives them the wisdom of Brahma, whereby they may understand how every business is unstable; from indifference to such business arise the highest virtues of peace and patience, and thence again may be won the bliss of Brahma".

Such a serious concept of art would imply theories and standards of criticism equally sophisticated. Aesthetic experience is left to the *rasika,* the spectator, the listener. The musician simply creates the conditions. This explains why passive listening is almost impossible where Indian music is concerned. Keeping time, often quite ostentatiously, at Indian concerts is not considered bad etiquette. The spectacle of a silent immobile audience holding its breath until the last phrase to applaud a fine performance is unknown in traditional Indian music circles where the most cultivated part of the audience often punctuates improvisations with nods of assent and little eulogistic phrases. *Rasaswadhana,* the tasting of *rasa,* the appreciation of art, depends on the cultivated sensibility of the listener. Dhananjaya, an early medieval critic, in his *Dasarupa* says quite definitely: "The *rasika's* own capacity to be delighted is the most important thing".

I have outlined the tradition in brief. It has by no means been a static one, but one that has grown and developed over the years, absorbing influences both from within and without, reflecting social changes and religious upheavals. Its course has been like that of a river, gathering in size and strength as it flows along, turning round awkward corners and obstacles,

now calm and unruffled, now turbulent and torrential.

Today the course of that true flow is being faced with major qualitative changes.

As long as we were a feudal, medieval poeple — however sophisticated, however subtle, however searching — the traditional melodic system was adequate for our self-expression. A melodic system, like two-dimensional painting is adequate for the expression of a somewhat static state of consciousness. Static, but not stagnant.

Now we are emerging from a static feudal set-up into a dynamic democratic society with all the pangs of a rebirth. The expression of the new hopes, the new fevers, the new restlessness cannot be in terms of sheltered, aristocratic, leisurely techniques and idioms. In India today, contemplation is giving place to action; introspection to extroversion; intuition to reason; emotion to intellect. We are beginning to look outwards instead of merely inward.

This new state of being and this new consciousness would require new idioms of expression, new approaches to the art, new attitudes. Here there is room for both concord and discord. (Harmony implies both). Here there is room for symmetry as well as assymetry.

In the creation and in the performance of even our traditional music one can already sense the beginning of the new forces at work.

Among the many forces at work in this situation three forms of the mass media — the Cinema, the gramophone record and Broadcasting — are playing crucial roles and provide the main winds of change. Of these Broadcasting is, or should

be, the most significant and constructive factor.

II

Music is the most 'broadcastable' of all the arts. In other words, broadcasting is a natural vehicle for music. All the other arts that figure prominently in broadcast programmes have to be apprehended through several senses. Most programmes are *about* something. They give you news, tell you a story, enact a play, reconstruct history, report an event. In all this the broadcaster recreates everything in terms of the auditory senses. And the sound that comes out of a loudspeaker is hardly ever heard merely for the sake of the sound — except in music. Pure or absolute music — as apart from programme music or songs with words — is the most abstract, the most integrated and the most highly developed aural art, and it functions solely in the realm of sound. It may evoke in us huge shadows of wonder, or emotions translatable into other senses of perception. But that would be incidental. And one can talk interminably about its philosophical content, its symbolism, its spirituality, its mysticism. But all that really matters in music is what can be *heard* of it and it can all, be put into a microphone and taken out of a loudspeaker without serious damage or distortion. Almost every other broadcast programme — literary broadcasts, the radio play, the broadcast talk, the feature programme, variety — involves the conditioning of the material to broadcasting techniques. That means compromises, mental reservations, mental adjustments. But music can be broadcast *per se*. No references, no apologies, no qualifications.

It is only natural, therefore, that music should be the staple food of broadcasting. About 50% of the broadcasting time of most broadcasting organisations in the world is devoted to music. This factor — the sheer quantity of broadcast

music that is heard the world over every day — opens up whole worlds of possibilities. Some 700 million radio sets with a potential 3000 million or more of listeners are tuned to music programmes for something like five hours a day! This makes radio the biggest instrument of musical education or mis-education that has ever been created. It can make or unmake musical tastes, develop or kill creative activity, make or kill individual reputations on a scale unthinkable in the days before broadcasting. And we have seen it happening. Nazi Germany with one full sweep banned all Jewish music and musicians including some of the world's greatest executants, not to mention other distinguished "political suspects". Soviet Russia for many years banned all cheap dance music. All India Radio banned the use of the harmonium in broadcasting, an action the effect of which on Indian music may be more far-reaching and significant than we realise.

Radio has taken classical music, opera, ballet to the homes of millions of people the world over who never before had a chance of hearing such things performed by great musicians. The magnitude of this impact on the public mind is a little difficult to measure. But it poses a big challenge and responsibility. The extraordinary thing about radio is that you can't ignore it. For better or for worse, whatever we broadcast will leave its impact on the national character. There is no doubt that the future of music will be determined to a great extent by the policies of broadcasting organisations the world over.

What is the role that broadcasting can play when dealing with the traditional music of a country like India? First there is the question of selection and projection. To a lover of classical music, popular music is often anathema. To a lover of popular music, everything else is just excruciating. They both pay taxes and the annual licensing fee, and they both

have the right to expect their favourite music. There are listeners who use broadcast music as serious education and there are those who use it as a sedative for tired nerves. There are listeners who put up with anything without a murmer; while others are never satisfied with anything and kick on the slightest provocation. All these have to be satisfied.

The first thing that a broadcasting organisation should decide is that there are only two kinds of music as far as broadcasting goes — good and bad. The categories and the various closed forms do not matter. *Dhrupad* or *Thumri, Khayal* or *film hits, Pallavi* or *Thukkudas* — there can be good and bad of all these. There is always room for the good, never any room for the bad. This calls for the most catholic of catholic tastes. There is no room for eclecticism. Having granted that, the next thing to achieve is a judicious allocation in programmes of the various categories. There is the noble heritage of classical music. This has to be preserved, enriched, its hidden beauties unravelled. There is the rich and most variegated treasure-house of folk music. This has to be discovered, resuscitated, placed in its correct perspective and presented in an acceptable and understandable form. With the changing needs of our time and the new pattern of our lives, other forces are coming on the scene — incidental music for films, new types of creative impulses, experimental music. There is the whole world of Light Music, of popular music. In all these, cheap and debasing vulgarisations have to be firmly set aside and genuine craftsmanship, clean enjoyable light music and intelligent experiments fully encouraged. Finally there is this question of good taste, that indefinable attribute, of which custodianship is both a tricky and thankless job. There are no measurable standards for a good many of these things. All that one can do is to go by liberal human values and standards. And one must never lose one's sense of proportion. This is not easy, particularly during times when the demand for cheap

sentimentality is loud and persistent. Delightful pleasantries and even trivialities have their legitimate nooks and corners, but they should never be allowed to usurp or even clash with nobler and more enduring things. If one must err, one must err on the side of truth and enduring greatness.

We, in India, have some special problems. The musical profession is not as well organised as in the West. We haven't the discipline that a concert tradition brings to the art; and the many correctives and suggestions which the professional musician can bring to broadcasting (and which have proved so invaluable to broadcasting in the West) we have to do without. Instead of the musician patronising broadcasting as in the West, here broadcasting has taken on the role of a patron. A fully trained professional musician with a liberal education in the humanities is a rarety in India. So is informed and objective criticism. In spite of all this All India Radio can claim to have achieved, almost imperceptibly, a great deal to its credit in the field of music. This achievement is not always obvious, and what is more, is likely to be taken for granted. With an activity which is so much in the public eye and, whose impact is continuous and to some extent inevitable, the good things are always taken for granted. It is the residue which comes in for criticism, not always informed.

Then there are the more obvious aspects of the impact of broadcasting on music. To many a professional musician who is accustomed to the leisure and the slight casualness of the drawing room, broadcasting has brought a discipline and a concentration which have been sorely needed. The red light on the studio wall is a stern disciplinarian. Broadcasting has made it possible for Northern listeners to hear the best of the Carnatic system and *vice versa*. The two systems have an underlying unity and each can and should learn a great deal from the other. The National programmes of Music broadcast

from Delhi are an attempt to present the best of the national heritage (Northern, Southern and folk) to the widest possible audience.

I have sketched the *raison d'etre* of music broadcasts and the general situation as is obtained in India today.

It all started in the nineteen twenties when broadcasting came into being in India in a limited and somewhat contrived fashion. The audience was limited, the number of receiving sets even more so, and the artistic problems involved in putting music on the air, let alone the social and other impacts of the medium were far from the minds of the organisers. After some initial set-backs and problems, the Government took over the responsibility for public broadcasting and 1936 saw the birth of All India Radio, the organisation that was to develop and control broadcasting in India. The early years of British controlled broadcasting showed little awareness of the nature of the medium or of the revolutionary role it could play in disseminating, preserving and strengthening traditional music. Indian classical music which needs leisurely techniques, with improvisations which require time to develop, was broadcast in brief interludes of ten and fifteen minutes, often announced and presented with insufficient knowledge. There was little rapport between traditional music as performed outside the studio and inside.

It was only ofter independence, when broadcasting was reorganised and developed as a really national service, that there emerged an awareness of its role in national development. As far as music is concerned, the early fifties were important and significant years. For the first time, traditional musicians were inducted to Broadcasting House to plan, produce and supervise the broadcasting of music. The National Programme was started in 1952. It was Ravi Shankar, at that time a member

of the music staff of All India Radio, one of the directors of the *Vadya Vrinda,* who gave the first programme in the weekly series which is continuing to this day.

For over twenty years, every Saturday night, A.I.R. has broadcast what has come to be regarded as its most prestigious music programme — the National Programme as it is called. The duration of the programme is ninety minutes. Every great musician of India — Hindusthani and Carnatic — has featured in it, many of the really great, repeatedly. Folk music representing practically every area, every language, every group has been heard in it. Nor have the lighter forms, particularly those of considerable artistic validity been neglected. In short, the National Programme attempts to project the best of India's national heritage in music. The programme is broadcast over the entire network of All India Radio. The presentation in Hindi and English is carefully done, providing intelligent and useful introductions to the music, the performer(s), salient features of style etc. Taking all factors into consideration it can be said that the National Programme has been perhaps the greatest single instrument of music education and appreciation in India in the last twenty years.

There are other important roles that the Programme has played in Indian music. For the first time in the history of Indian music it made the music of the North available to the South and *vice versa.* This has led to a widening of the musicians' horizons and a kind of cross-fertilisation which has strengthened and enriched the tradition. The National Programme has made millions of listeners, who knew nothing of the music of areas other than their own, aware of the beauties and subtleties of new and unheard of musical instruments and voices and *ragas.*

Along with the National Programme should be mentioned

some of its regional variations. Many regions, the South and the West in particular, have their regional hook-up programmes which are in the nature of miniature national programmes. Then there is the annual Radio Music Festival which makes it possible for listeners to hear in a period of some ten days a good cross-section of the national heritage in all its variegated splendour. The Festival also arranges national competitions every year — for North and South, for vocal and instrumental, for group singing, for new creative work. For the radio it is a search for new talent. For the young musician it is an opportunity. The Festival is also a time for Seminars, for serious discussions on the nature and the development of the tradition and the problems it faces.

From the very outset, the National Programmes (and more recently all important programmes by distinguished artistes) were all recorded in full for the archives. The result is that All India Radio is the repository today of an enormous amount of recorded material. The preservation of traditional musical cultures like India's is one of the vital needs of the day. Ours is primarily an oral tradition which is being faced today with many challenges and many problems. Technology has now made it possible for us to preserve the tradition so as to revitalise it, so as to keep vital links with the past alive, keep up its continuity and provide us with correctives at a time of hybridisation and debasement. Mass Communication media like Radio (and the gramophone record to a lesser extent) are playing a heroic role in this situation.

Generally speaking, the tradition-bound society of India's musicians has taken kindly to the mass media. All India Radio today employs some two thousand musicians, all of whom (with the exception of a dozen or so of 'Western' musicians) are traditionally trained Indian musicians, the majority from families of hereditary artistes. Most of them have made their peace with

the discipline of studios, the warning of green and red lights, and the economy of carefully timed transmissions. This has not spoiled them for the more leisurely recitals and improvisations outside broadcasting stations. On the contrary, the discipline of the studio has given their performances a much needed economy of statement and precision in musical utterances.

The radio has been a valuable area for experimentation. Research on the construction and improvement of musical instruments has started. A close study of the frequency range of Indian musical instruments is being done. Ensemble playing is coming into existence. Group singing is being encouraged.

India had a tradition of 'orchestral' and 'choral music'. But it is unlikely they used harmony as we understand it today. Harmony enhances the range, the depth, the colour of music and can add a new dimension to purely melodic music. Rules of harmony come after any new music is created, not before, just as grammer comes after a language has been created. It will be interesting to speculate if we can create a harmonic system without losing our identity or cramping our present style.

A little over twenty years ago, All India Radio created an Indian ensemble called *Vadya Vrinda.* Ravi Shankar and T. K. Jayarama Iyer, a traditional Carnatic musician of the highest standards were its two directors. *The Vadya Vrinda* has about 40 instruments — strings, wood-wind and a rich percussion group. It does not use any harmony, but is a disciplined group which makes good use of the colour of the various instruments, the variety and liveliness of our drums and the endless invention inherent in our prodigious improvisation. The *Vadya Vrinda* has not really solved any problems yet, but it has created some and that is how serious experimentation

should start.

And now Television is on the scene. India which had only one modest 'experimental' station until now has a second one in Bombay today. And four more have been planned for the next two years. By 1975 we are promised a satellite and shall be launching on a significant and vitally important pilot project to assess its role in education and socio-economic development.

What is the role of music programmes on Television? For radio, music is a 'natural'. Is the image of the performing musician on the Television Screen a help or a hindrance?

Goethe once said: "True music is for the ear alone. I want to see anyone I am talking to. On the other hand, who sings to me must sing unseen; his form must neither attract nor distract me". Opinion has been sharply divided on this. There is no doubt that the appearance, the mannerisms, the dress, the gestures of performers are often distracting and unwelcome. This applies equally to singers and instrumentalists, soloists and groups. On the other hand, the concentration, the absorption in his art of a great instrumentalist, the perfection of his controlled, rhythmic movement often help us to listen better. The surroundings, the atmosphere, can make a difference — like an organ recital in a cathedral. These are, however, emotional stimuli to listening, perhaps even to concentration. They do not add to the quality of the music as such.

If we could isolate the music from its sources, and be left with the sound alone, then only can its whole structure, its development, rhythm, the subtleties of harmony and counterpoint, and of texture be revealed to us in terms of pure music as conceived within its own inner laws. This is a world

contained within itself with no visual distractions (or attractions) of any kind, with no prop or external stimuli to underline it. It is radio's great opportunity to present this world without any of its physical trappings — without any of the embarrassments or contradictions. Radio can compel attention to the music alone. The performer is no longer the focus of our attention. Music becomes the true focus of our listening.

This comes home to us particularly in the televising of music. While a concert of one or two hours duration may make excellent listening over radio, a televised music programme of similar duration becomes difficult to sustain. With the visual element added, there is a shift in the focus of attention. No amount of ingenious camera angles, close-ups, of individual musicians and of groups and families of instruments seem to solve the problems here. A dramatic or flamboyant musician may be interesting to watch for a while but then the music suddenly becomes secondary to his histrionics and something is lost. In desparation the camera may wander away from the studio to wide open spaces and landscapes, but that is really no solution.

The straight televising of music is a fascinating and challenging subject. It is fraught with problems which have not been fully met yet, let alone resolved.

In television, the dominating factor is the visual one, not the element of sound. In music the element of sound is not only the dominating factor, but is in fact the only factor involved. While in Radio, the problem, most of the time, is to compress all your senses into the purely aural one, in T.V. the attempt is to organise everything into a visual framework with the sound as a subsidiary, though often important reinforcing element. In televising music, this situation has to be

reversed. The sound of music must be given pre-eminence. Can this be done?

How can the sound be reinforced and the distracting visual image subdued? If there are legitimate stimuli to listening in the visual image, can they be separated from irrelevant details? Can we resolve the conflict between, say, a static ensemble and the dynamic music it creates? Can the viewer be taken into the music and his attention sustained? Can the inner meaning of a score be revealed to a viewer more purposefully? These are challenges to be met. The problems do vary from situation to situation, artiste to artiste, from ensemble to ensemble, from one type of music to another.

Indian music, for example, may not pose the same problems as Western music. For one thing, large static-looking ensembles are seldom employed in serious music. Many ragas have strong visual parallels which could be used imaginatively in conveying the emotion. Finally, in serious Indian music the performer is the centre, the figure-head of the musical idea and the identification of the performer and the music is thus greater. The music does not have the effect of isolating the human figure from the instrument. The result is that the music, the instrument and the performer seem an integrated whole. The visual and aural elements do not disintegrate into their component parts, but seem to be at peace with each other.

Television in India is too young and has only touched the fringes of the musical scene to make its impact seriously felt on traditional music and music makers. But it is interesting to note that at the recent inauguration of the Bombay Television Centre, the programme opened with a Shahnai recital by Bismillah Khan, a traditional musician playing a traditional "auspicious" instrument with not the least touch of self-consciousness. The folk songs and dances that followed were also,

in the main, in the traditional mould. Quite obviously there is no harsh clash here. The T.V. equipment merely gave the music a wider unseen audience. There is no doubt that this kind of extension of an audience, the social impact of T.V. on the home, the clash of interests with live music-making, the role of T.V. in the field of musical education or miseducation and the bias inherent in home-viewing towards a passive attitude to artistic creation — have all to be watched carefully before we can be dogmantic in such matters. Fortunately we have the lessons of the more developed countries where T.V. had an earlier start. And we can be on our guard and see that an instrument of such power and persuasion never becomes a destructive element. Commercial television, indiscriminately and unscrupulously used, has this danger inherent in it. It is not the medium itself that poses problems, but the uses to which it can be put and, in fact, is being put in many parts of the world.

III

One mass communication medium that is having a major confrontation with traditional music is the Cinema. The commercial Indian film, in nine cases out of ten, is what is generally described as a "musical". Music is an important ingredient of the film and every character bursts forth into song on the slightest provocation. Thus, the expression 'Film Music' has a somewhat unusual connotation in India. It immediately conjures up a sound picture of light, popular, over-coloured, sensuous music with a very special type of 'orchestral' accompaniment. To extreme purists and votaries of classical music, this music is anathema. To the public at large this has become the most popular form of light entertainment. With considerable sections of the music-loving public it has become a craze. In discussions on music, passions run high when film music is mentioned. It has debased taste, it is a desecration of music,

it is killing the new generation, it is destroying our ancient, noble and sacred heritage of music — say the Pandits. It is the most exciting, the most soothing, the most hypnotic music we have; it is the only music with guts and passion and with a kick in it, and thank God for it — say the addicts. And the truth, as usual, is somewhere in between.

Indian Film music is all of what they all say it is. But it is not going to blow classical music off the face of this earth, though it is giving and will continue to give some disquieting moments to lovers of our traditional music. Our musical tradition is so deeply rooted that it is not likely to be blown off its feet by any new sporadic growth. I am not suggesting that we shouldn't be on our guard against commercialisation and vulgarisation. But one will have to accept the fact that in present day urbane life where the pleasures of life are taken somewhat lightly, both stimulants and narcotics will have a ready market.

Film music plays the same role in Indian music as thrillers and detective stories do in the field of literature. It is exciting for dulled nerves like a stimulant; it is soothing for over-wrought people like a sedative or a narcotic. It is streamlined, carefully wrapped-up, sugar-coated.

It is worth analysing how these effects are achieved in terms of music. The rhythm always takes the form of a slightly off-colour rumba, with the augularities and stresses of the original rhythm somewhat rounded off.

The melody is often quite attractive, the sort of melody which goes straight to the heart, with an element of the 'sob-stuff' in it. And it is rendered more in the style of crooning than singing. The singer speaks or whispers into the microphone. The microphone does the rest. The amplification of this

intimate, endearing tone out of all proportion to its accompaniments has a tremendously hypnotic effect in the auditorium. One has only to listen to the same thing in the foyer to see that half the magic is gone without the real setting.

Then there is the 'orchestral' accompaniment which consists of a large number of instruments, Indian and Western, in which Hawaiian guitars, saxophones and such instruments play leading and effective roles.

The film has created a new *genre* of singers, the 'play-back singer'. The best play-back singers are fine sensitive musicians with excellent voice control and the most immaculate intonation. The music 'directors' too are slick and clever, know every trick of the trade and command fabulous fees by Western standards. Both the singers and the directors have mass following. In newspaper advertisements and posters their names quite often take precedence over the stars.

A whole channel of All India Radio is largely devoted to 'film music' and listener-rating here is the highest. It is this channel that carries the commercial broadcasts. If films have played a big role in creating a new *genre* of music, the commercial *Vividh Bharati* has certainly helped it and taken it a step further. Whatever the merits or demerits of the music, it is certainly anti-traditional. On the one hand, it has weaned millions of listeners away from traditional music. On the other hand, it has certainly given the creative artist a new area for experimentation.

The gramophone record looms large on the Indian musical horizon. Outside the Western idiom, Indian music today has the largest number of labels and the biggest sales of non-European records. Here too, it is the film hits that command the highest sales. The combination of cinema, radio and the

L.P. has played a fantastic role in considerably changing public taste as far as music is concerned.

In all this, the lesson is obvious. There is nothing inherently vicious in mass media as such. The crucial point is the type of use to which we put them. The medium is, largely, the message. But we *can* condition the medium provided we take it as a challenge to be faced fairly and squarely.

To the developing societies of this world, the mass media, purposefully used, can bring, in abundant measure, every tradition of music and the dance. The imaginative use of sound and image can reveal to us in a larger measure than ever before the greatest creative achievements of man, the greatest utterances in the field of Poetry, Drama, Music. But to do that one has to act with faith and courage, base one's judgement on judicious human values and set one's face firmly against vulgarity and commercialism. Because on what we do or do not do may depend "the opening or closing for centuries to come of the mind of man".

DANCE TRADITIONS OF INDIA AND MASS MEDIA

by

Kapila Vatsyayan

The Indian performing arts, particularly what can be termed as 'Dance' can be visualised as the many-armed goddess, Durga, or perhaps the figure of Nataraja Siva dancing in the twelve modes of the Tandava. It also presents the same image as Siva acquiring and executing 108 *karanas* (cadences) or passages of movements, which are staggering in their multiplicity of form, plurality of approach as also their amazing unity or at least consanguinity of content and complete identity of ultimate purpose.

Like the concept of the one God head abstract, and the innumerable Indian gods and goddesses who acquire many forms, like Indian philosophy, religion, economic structuring and social organisation, the dance traditions of India also present a complex picture. Characteristic of the complexity is the co-existence of a highly abstract approach on one level and an equally, concretely symbolic multiplicity of forms on the other. In dance there can thus be no question of considering Indian dance as one monolithic whole, either in space or in time. There are the dance traditions of India, both in a spatial arrangement and in a chronological order.

These traditions could be seen and analysed on various planes. One could always use the anthropological yardstick and classify them in terms of social structure and the level of economic development. Indian society has been often seen as a chiefly agrarian society with pockets or islands of urban culture. Sometimes the distinction is also made between rural culture and urban culture. A further categorisation of the rural and urban culture can be seen in the co-existence of innumerable tribal cultures, village folk cultures, diverse semi-urbanised traditional societies and a modern urbanised society. However, one could reject these anthropological and socio-economic yardsticks and consider the traditions of the dance in artistic terms.

These forms, whether they are termed 'traditional', 'classical' or 'folk', or whether they are seen as dances of the primitives or the tribals, of folk communities or of sophisticated people, would have to be clearly identified both in terms of their socio-economic milieu, as also in terms of the evolution of artistic form and style distinctive of each region and category. Unless this is done, any statement on the dance of India in relation to its projection and dissemination would be only the partial truth, giving the impression of a one dimensional picture. The approach to the dance traditions in relation to the socio-economic set-up and in relation to the artistic forms may present a somewhat complex picture, but it would be nearer the truth, authentic in its complexity and diversity.

In the Indian context it is necessary to clarify that the terminology of primitive, folk, ethnic and art dance, which has been used so far in the context of the Western traditions is either not applicable or it describes the Indian situation inadequately. In the West it has been commonly believed that any sophisticated art form evolved out of comparatively

primitive indigenous forms, and the process of development was linear in character. It has also been implied that there has always been an in-built tension, an irreconcilable conflict between the urban and the rural, the industrial and the agricultural societies, the mass and the individual cults, the technological knowledge and the humanities. It has also often been stated that the technological progress of knowledge has invariably shadowed cultural development, and that the counterpoising of traditional culture and modern technology has meant the annihilation of the traditional culture and the replacement of it by a uniform, mechanically produced and technologically disseminated mass culture. In the case of India, specially if we look at the tradition of dance, we find that the so-called categories of primitive, folk, ethnological dances and art dances are continuously merging with one another and there is evidence of continual inter-action. It would appear that as in other spheres of philosophical and intellectual formulation, as also in the artistic sphere, the Indian mind has not juxtaposed these as a pair of opposites necessarily in conflict with each other. It has arranged them in a cyclical order of fragments of a total whole where each fragment complements the other. At the philosophical level this attitude manifests itself in the concept of *Rta* (world cosmic order) which emanates from *Satya* (absolute truth); the centre holds the circle and the circle holds the centre. It is not a "one way movement from outwards into the unity of a nation and into a single term of fixed closed border-lines". It is, instead, as Heinmann puts it in *Facets of Indian Thought*, "an expansion from an intensive nucleus into vague unlimited forms of growth and uncertain periphery". The seeming opposites, therefore, have always to be investigated as parts of a whole in a spatial arrangement moving in cyclic time rather than a series of different levels arranged in a vertical uni-dimensional linear arrangement.

On the socio-economic level, the same attitude has given rise to a social structure which has been identified by anthropologists and sociologists, such as Redfield, Milton Singer and others as the Great and Little traditions of India. Milton Singer has summed up this eloquently: "In India Little and Great traditions are not neatly differentiated along a village urban axis. Both kinds of traditions are found in villages and in the cities in different forms. Folk and ritual kinds of performances survived in fragments in the cities, but they are very old forms and are common in villages and towns". At the artistic level again, the tradition cannot be seen as just high and low, folk and classical, popular and learned, hierarchic and lay. On the level of literature it has been seen as a Sanskrit tradition and that of the vernaculars and the Prakrits. It has also been seen as the tradition of the lettered word, such as the Sastric tradition and the tradition of the non-verbal forms, as also what has been termed as the oral tradition, depending on aural communication.

Perhaps the ancient formulators of Indian aesthetics were conscious of this multi-dimensional approach. Although one cannot identify the terms *Margi* and *Desi*, *Natya* and the *Lokadharmi* as classical and folk, or idealistic or realistic, as has been done sometimes, nonetheless these terms point at a situation obtained in India as early as the second century A.D. or perhaps earlier, and which continues to have validity today. A study of the texts of Indian arts and a study of the social history of the Arts make it clear that there was a continuous dialogue between different economic levels of society and between different classes of artists. It is this factor of mobility and interaction which has given a distinctive character to Indian arts, and to Indian music and dance in particular. One can always discern common features amongst different styles or in different levels of performances in a particular region as also a distinctiveness, a regional or even

local uniqueness in each of these forms.

One may well ask the question, why it is necessary to go into these historical and sociological considerations in a discussion of the dance traditions of India and mass media. This is necessary because the dance has to be seen as one component of a civilisation and culture, where there has been a continued interaction between the sophisticated tradition which has been termed as the Great tradition, a tradition which is abstracted and systematised by the specialist, the literati, mainly in urban centres and the Little traditions comprising innumerable folk, tribal, village traditions of smaller communities spread throughout the length and breadth of India.

Let us then try and understand the dance traditions in terms of the general civilisation and cultural patterns. It should then be possible to have the following impressionistic map of Indian civilisation and culture generally, and of Dance in particular.

This pattern can be seen both in the socio-economic organisation of a particular area, and its repetition over a vast geographical area.

In the absence of an alternate appropriate terminology, one is obliged to use the familiar terminology of tribal/folk etc. There is, first and foremost, a pervasive tribal belt running through all parts of India. These tribal communities can be clearly distinguished from the traditional rural communities. The tribal belt comprises nearly 15 million people living in and around peninsular India, covering the hills, plateau and the neighbouring States of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal. The best known tribes amongst these which have a rich dance culture

are the Gond, the Santhal, the Bhil, the Oraon, the Khond, the Munda, the Paik, the Ho, the Korku, the Baiga, the Maria, the Bhumija and the Sansi of Rajasthan. To these could be added the tribes of Meghalaya, Arunachal, Nagaland, etc., which lie on the Northern frontiers of India, such as the Miri, the Kuki, the Zeliang and the Kabui. A sizable portion of Eastern Himalayan India and of Central India is inhabited by these tribes. They extend to South India. They could be grouped together from the point of view of ethnological types and economy. The dances of tribal India are characterised by their being closely related to life functions such as hunting and fishing, with a marked element of magic and totem.

There is the second stream of peasant or village India, a different level of peasant society. This agricultural society forms the bulk of India's population and spreads all over the country. The nucleus of this society is the village community which in turn has connections with townships and centres of religious worship such as the temples. This community can be distinguished from the tribal community in a variety of ways, including the dance traditions which are characteristic of the village folk.

A common feature of the dances of the village communities is their association with the agricultural cycle. Most dances of India which have been identified as folk dances revolve round the planting, sowing, harvesting, cutting and distribution of grain. On these functions is superimposed, occasionally, myth and legend which gives some dances a ritualistic character. The fertility dances which are known to all parts of India, can be traced back to these simple agricultural functions. Here also, regroupings are possible from the point of view of racial types, castes and sub-groups, language and folklore.

In dance there is a large variety which extends from solo

dances to group dances, to mime shows, environmental theatre and dance, etc. Although, part of the village community, but closer to townships, is another group, a group which could be termed, only for purposes of facility, a semi-literate group of people. This group (which acts almost as animators and communicators between agricultural peasant society and the sophisticated urban society) has been responsible for the dialogue which has continued between the folk and the classical levels in India. In the artistic sense, this is the group which has been the repository of the oral tradition, both when it has travelled from the sophisticated literates to peasant community and also when the local myth, legend and folklore of peasant society has travelled to sophisticated forms. In the context of dance, it is this group which has been responsible for sustaining the continuity of dance traditions of India at a time when the continuity was breaking down and had, indeed, broken down in all other spheres, particularly literature, painting, etc. The producers, actors and the audiences of what is known as traditional dance or dance drama in India are responsible for a theatrical performance where a clearcut categorisation of dance and dance drama or dance and theatre is no longer applicable. This traditional dance drama is total theatre in its finest sense where there is an amalgam of many theatrical forms. The theme presented is known, familiar and capable of wide re-interpretations. The performances of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as also the *Gita Govinda* would all fall under this category.

Finally, there is the sophisticated culture which may or may not happen to be urban, but one which is responsible for the creation and production of what has been termed classical dance. A distinction would have to be made between the culture of the traditional, sophisticated and the educated urban in India. The large mass of the educated urban has been, for purely historical reasons, alienated from these

traditions mentioned in all the four categories above. For a period of nearly 200 years or more there has been a severe dichotomy between those brought up in the western system of education in the cities and those belonging to the traditional culture either of the cities or the villages. The urbanised educated, though in a minority, have had a major influence in shaping tastes. On the other hand, out of this minority there has been a further minority, of a group of highly cultivated persons who have had the benefit of both 'western' education as also traditional education, *sastric* and oral, who have been urging for the rehabilitation of the best in traditional culture in the urban milieu. The efforts of this very small minority for the last thirty years has already borne fruit. It is this group which has been responsible for a renaissance, and a re-interpretation of Indian culture. Rabindranath Tagore, Rukmini Devi, poet Vallathol and some others were pioneers. Others have followed. Their efforts have borne fruit, and today amongst aeroplanes, cars and computers one sees an active, alive, continually rejuvenating traditional music and dance culture, where popular hybrid forms find it difficult to make inroads and Western influence is negligible or minimal.

In any discussion of dance traditions of India, all these levels or particular categories mentioned above have to be taken into consideration. Let us very briefly deal with the occasions for the dance, and the nature of the actor-audience relationship under each of these categories, and examine what changes are perceivable in each situation. The tribal, as also the folk dances of the agricultural society were essentially, (and continue to be), participative activities in which there is no actor-audience or dancer-spectator distinction. The tribal headman almost always is also the leader of the dance. The drummer of a folk dance is often also a headman of the peasant community. The tribal as also many of the folk dances perform a purely social function in which the community gets together

either to celebrate a victory or a good harvest or a good fishing or hunting session. This is true of the tribal dances of the Nagas, the harvest dances of the farmers of Gujarat and Saurashtra, the material dances and the sword dances of the Mopalas of Kerala and the *nati* dances of the villagers of the Kulu Valley. The dance itself becomes a medium for communication and serves the same purpose as mass media because here knowledge is transmitted, communication established and social progress facilitated.

Other occasions for participative activity and large mass contact were, and continue to be, the village fairs and *melas*, as also the festive occasions revolving round the temple. These occasions, from times immemorial, have been the nucleus of cultural activity in the Indian pattern. Whether or not the remains of the Mohanjodaro citadel and the great court of the Populace leads us to the conclusion of the existence of such a mass activity, there is ample evidence in Indian literature from the times of the *Rig Veda*, of the significant role played by such gatherings. The *Rig Veda* speaks of a community fair known as the *Samana;* here gamblers, singers, ministers, craftsmen, dancing masters, tribesmen, kings (and even the gods) rubbed shoulders against one another. The secular character of such fairs is to be clearly distinguished from the esoteric and ritualistic practices about which also there is ample evidence. The sculptural and the pictorial evidence of community dances and of other participative activity reinforces the archaeological and the literary evidence.

Continuity in such activity has been maintained for over three thousand years with an amazing tenacity. Today for the first time, even more than any foreign invasion, there is a real encounter with a new factor which may bring about unforeseen changes. In this traditional pattern, the arrival of radio and television can have significant results. Unless we are careful,

the community instead of being responsible for creating and participating in its own culture, will be reduced to the position of a passive spectator responding to a mechanical medium. Television and the exposure of these groups of people to forms of urban popular culture may be the beginning of the end of the distinctiveness of each of these rich participative activities. These folk forms have been responsible for providing a vitality and buoyancy to more sophisticated dance forms. Modern technological mass media like the Cinema and Television can play significant and constructive roles today. The dances of tribal and folk communities could and should be authentically recorded and disseminated over the mass media. This will discourage the creation of pseudo-folkloristic forms. Indeed, if the organs of mass media are used imaginatively, the threats which are being faced by this tribal and folk culture could be greatly reduced. At the moment, with the advent of industry and technology in other spheres of life, the dance is at a great disadvantage because it is no longer interwoven into the life cycle, the agricultural functions and the social occasions.

In this context, a major effort made by the Government of India at the initiative of the present Prime Minister was the institution of a folk and tribal dance festival in Delhi on the occasion of the Republic Day Celebrations. Nearly 1000 farmers, tribesmen, village folk, fishermen, weavers, potters, craftsmen, and housewives take part in the Festival. For a period of three weeks they live together in a camp. The processes of acculturation during these last twenty years amongst groups who have been otherwise isolated from each other and from urban cultures in particular, have many lessons to teach. Initially it took the groups some time to take pride in their particular form, and influences of groups which had proved more popular were immediate, and the temptation for imitation great. Gradually, there followed a period of pride

in regional distinctiveness and identity. They have learnt to respect the differences that exist and have also become conscious of the fact that they have a part to play in the cultural life of the sub-continent. The elite of Delhi and the thousands of people who come to watch these festivities have been conscious for the first time of the rich and varied culture of their country. For the educated literates this was a reminder of the continued existence of the immensely vast and solid base of the non-literate culture of India.

Over 20,000 people watch these dance performances in an open-air stadium. A concerted effort at the presentation of this indigenous culture before large urban audiences all over India and efforts at encouragement and patronage for the growth of this culture, can and should be undertaken by the mass media. This has to be faced both as an opportunity and a challenge. The diversity and variety of the dances have to be jealously guarded; and the temptation to perpetuate one uniform folkloristic pattern firmly resisted.

Amongst the tribal and the folk dances of India there is another variety of dances which has been identified as ritual dances and dances of magic, of sorcery, of trance and the like. These dances are performed by a special person who is supposed to be possessed of supernatural powers and who serves as an instrument to ward off evil from a person's body or to ward off disaster from the whole community. The occasions for such ritual dances vary from community to community, region to region in India, but they are still performed and their impact on the community is still considerable. One cannot hazard a guess on what would happen to this particular group of dances in India, no matter which part of the country they come from, wi'h the impact of modern technology. As long as the community or a group of people continue to respond psychically to the effects of such ritual practices which

are sometimes embodied in the form of dance, the art forms which evolve as a result, will continue. The *Kechek* dance of Bali is an excellent instance of what could happen to ritualistic trance dance as a result of tourism, advent of mass media, etc. The author had the opportunity to watch a *Kechek* dance, or more correctly speaking a *Kechek* ritual, meant only for the Balinese, a restricted performance, where two young men went through the whole ritual of worship leading to a trance and followed by a dance on the embers of the coconut shells. This had a dance component, a community fully in rapport with the happenings, and everyone sharing the ecstatic moments in the full belief of its leading to the propitiation of the gods. Alongside, another artistic performance based on the *Kechek* was seen, where very distinctive musical patterns of the *Kechek* dance were used as background or peripheral material to a performance of the *Ramayana*. The audience this time was quite separate from the performers, although in rapport and responsive. There was also a third experience of the *Kechek* dance performed in one of the many dance theatres of Bali for foreign audiences. In one experience it was possible to see how the authenticity of a ritual could be transformed into an artistic form, and in the other how it could be diluted for purposes of a foreign market or further an export market.

In India an analogous situation exists, and similar transformations may take place unless there are other inner motivations or external constrictions against vulgarising sacred ritual practices purely for entertainment purposes. Once again, the mass media can play a very important part in increasing the awareness of semi-urbanised and urban-educated groups of people of these rituals and the ritual dances, instead of using some of the elements of the rituals haphazardly for purposes of popular theatrical performances. It is always possible that in the process of social change these ritual practices may disappear as many others before them have. With the disappear-

ance and extinction of these ritual practices will also disappear many forms of highly symbolic dances prevalent in many parts of India. This, of course, is natural and must be faced. A complete documentation of these forms would be helpful for posterity. Contemporary dancers make use of them if necessary, for 'art dance' rather than for light entertainment.

The group of traditional dance drama and dance forms is the most important category from the point of view of the form becoming a tool of mass media. Most important amongst the traditional dances or dance drama forms are the performances of *Ramayana* or the *Ramlila* which are common to all parts of India. At Dussehra time one could travel from Kulu to Mysore and from Banaras to Gujarat and find traditional dance drama or traditional dances revolving round the life of Rama being performed everywhere. These take the form of dances, or dance dramas or pure theatrical plays, or 'tableaux' or the innumerable types of puppets (leather puppets, rod puppets and marionettes) or pure narration as in the *Hari Katha*, the *Ram Katha*, etc. These traditional dance dramas are not restricted to villages and have often travelled to townships or to urban areas. Forms such as *Yakshagana*, the *Tamasha*, the *Nautanki*, *the Dasavatar* of Konkan, the *Bhagavatamela* of Tamil Nadu, the *Bhamakalapam* of Andhra Pradesh, the *Ankia Nat* of Assam and the *Raslila* (revolving round the Krishna theme found in Manipur, Orissa, Bengal, Brindaban, Saurashtra, Gujarat, Punjab hills) are eloquent testimony to the tenacity of the oral tradition to continue and survive against all odds and under conditions of acute economic underdevelopment, social stagnation, political subjugation and foreign invasion. The *Ramlila*, the *Hari Katha* and these other forms adapted themselves to the local situation, assimilated contemporary influences, and always eloquently expressed the concern of the people in a particular locality to a contemporary situation.

In the traditional dance-drama forms mentioned above and many others, there is always a very definite component of pure dancing. In fact, in tracing the history of any classical dance form, it is necessary to look at the traditional dance drama forms which provide as many elements, to the formal styles as the purely literary sophisticated *sastric* traditions. The traditional dance dramas, therefore, serve a dual role. They are the transmitters of the sophisticated literary tradition through the oral and verbal medium; tales of the epics, myths, of the *puranas* and samples chosen from philosophical texts are woven into the fabric of the artistic performances. They are also the transmitters to the sophisticated traditions, of local elements which are particular to a region or a group. Besides, they serve the purpose of the establishment of mass contact on a large scale. A performance of *Ramlila* or the *Hari Katha,* etc., draws multitudes. The *Ramlila* such as the one held in Ramnagar, Varanasi, is environmental theatre at its best. The dance moves from locality to locality as the day shifts and the narrative moves. With the movement of the story of Rama, there is the movement of the community, and through the enactment of the story of Rama's life, the Indian finds his identity. These epics and their unparalleled influence on dance, sculptural and musical traditions of South East Asia need no underlining.

What would happen to these traditional dances or dance drama forms, if instead of each little district, small locality, village, enacting its *Ramlila,* television were to take over where everyone would watch day after day, ten days preceding Dussehra the same version? The participative element would be taken out and the audience would be left passive. Today most of the performers are non-professionals: those who take part in Ramlila are considered lucky and are constantly envied. In other dance drama forms there are certain periods of the year when they perform and for the rest they have other voca-

tions. Doubts have been expressed that this category of amateur performers (other than the professional performers of *Hari Katha*, etc.) is in some danger of extinction, though there is no reason to believe that the advent of T.V. by itself would annihilate such art forms. One thing is certain. Documentation of all these forms through the mass media is an immediate need. Also, the presentation of authentic forms of these traditional dances and dance drama forms, even on the experimental T.V., is necessary for the education of the urban elite.

Finally, we come to the category of the classical dance. These classical dances have emerged as distinctive forms in particular regions of India, whether it be in the South or North or East. Today five such styles are recognised.

Bharatanatyam which has evolved as much out of sacred antiquity as a variety of traditional dance drama forms, such as the *Bhagavatamela* and even folk forms, like the *Koothus*, is a highly stylised solo 'art dance' which was originally performed in temples and only as devotional worship. Its present form and structure can be traced back to the creative genius of four brothers who lived in the Tanjore courts about 250 years ago. The literary content is highly contextual. The poetic word is set to a sound pattern of a traditional *raga* and *tala*. It is performed before an initiated audience who understands both the improvisations in the *abhinaya* (mime) as also in the pure *nrtta* passages. What is true of *Bharatanatyam* is almost truer of *Kathakali*. The dance style emerged as a highly stylised dance or dance drama from folk roots, such as the *kalis* and the ritual dances on the one hand and a developed sophisticated literary tradition on the other. It would be impossible for an uninitiated spectator to respond to the subtleties of a *Kathakali* performance, specially if he or she is not trained to respond to the make-up symbolism, to the costuming symbolism and, above all, the language of gestures, specially that of the hands and

the eyes and the face.

Manipuri and *Orissi*, although simpler, share these characteristics with the other dance forms. They have also evolved out of the regional folk and ritualistic and court traditions of the particular regions. In their emergence, none of the earlier levels of the folk or the tribal forms have disappeared. All have co-existed. This is particularly true of *Manipuri*. A variety of dance styles exist in the region. The range extends from the dances of *Nagas* (a generic name for all tribal dances of the region) and dances of the valley inhabitants and rural masses such as the *Thombal Chongbi* to the ritual dances of the animistic cults of *Maibas* and *Meibees*, and finally to the highly sophisticated art dances of the *Rasa* and *Bhangi Pareng* variety. An analysis of each of these forms makes it quite clear that while each succeeding level of social economic development assimilated the features of the earlier layer, it did not cause extinction of the first layers. Indeed, a contrary movement is also noticed. An analysis of content, style and technique of each of these forms establishes the validity of our initial hypothesis that there is a continuous circular movement where the tribal and folk forms provide sustenance and vigour to the more sophisticated self-conscious forms, and the final classical form provides a body of literary content and a degree of stylisation which in turn influences folk forms. The phenomenon can be understood only within the framework of Indian cultural style rather than through the application of pure socio-economic yardsticks.

Kathak, the youngest of the classical styles typical of North India is characterised by its secularity, its urbane quality and its sophisticated virtuosity. However, in this style also one can discern elements of folk forms of Northern India and elements of religious ritual or at least traditional dances as the *Rasdharis* of *Brindaban*.

The venue of classical dances was originally the temple or the temple court. Here came devotees or those who wished to imbibe the atmosphere of the temple through the art forms. With the decadence which set in whether within the temple or its social organisation, and with the consequent shift in cultural values, some of these dances were banned by the British and perhaps with enough provocation. In the late 19th century it appears that an act was promulgated to ban the dancing of the *devadasis* in the temples. It was not until 1947 that the ban was lifted, the survival of these traditions in different parts of India ensured, and they came to take their rightful place in society as recognised Art or Concert Dances. More popularly they are termed as 'classical' dances performed less today in the vicinity of the temple, and more in the modern theatres/halls of urban centres.

During the last 25 years, there have emerged in India dancers of classical styles who do not belong to the traditional families and who do not have a guild or family tree of dancers. They come from middle classes and have learnt sometimes under the older teacher-pupil relationship *(guru sishya sampradaya)*, but have been more often trained in the institutional framework of dance academies established specially for the training of musicians and dancers. In fact, except for a dozen dancers, most other classical dancers of contemporary India are products of this institutionalised training. However, the dance teachers in these academies, so far, are the products of the traditional training and have a heredity. The problems which face the training of the dancers in the institutional framework are numerous. Dance does not form a part and parcel of the formal educational curricula, except in three universities and a few schools. This results in separate academies for dance, but academies which do not necessarily train professional dancers on the pattern of Saddler Wells or the Bolshoi. They are academies which cater for both amateur performers as also profes-

sional performers. A result of this is that the degree of proficiency attained by a dancer is not necessarily very high when she comes on the stage. Her debut on the stage may be conditioned by her intrinsic merit and the training she has received, but it may be conditioned much more by publicity or write-ups and by mass media with an eye on making a star out of her overnight. Often, while the star is made, the career of the dancer is shortened by many years. The fame is short-lived, the practice decreases and the stamina disappears. This is not true of the earlier generation of dancers for two simple reasons. When they did not perform in temples they performed for small audiences and before the people who had initiation and as much training as the dancers. This posed a challenge for the dancer; she or he was being continuously tested. In the present situation the classical dancer appears before a vast heterogenous uninitiated audience who may or may not have discrimination or taste. This has meant that the dancer can take liberties with her technique and more so in the portions of *abhinaya* where she must draw upon her knowledge of the myth and legends of India, and her powers of improvisation and creation. In the contemporary situation, most dancers are content to repeat what they have been taught without using the framework of a particular number for creation or improvisation which is the essence of the Indian classical tradition. The tradition of improvisation or *Sancharibhava* has continued in music, but in dance this is becoming progressively rarer and there might shortly be a time when dancers may not be in a position to improvise either in the pure dance (the *nrtta)* portion or in the *abhinaya* (mime) portion. When these dances are presented on television, a further dilution may take place because the dancer is not facing an actual audience. It is inherent in the classical dance forms of India that the audience must respond to the creation or improvisation or re-interpretation of a known piece. Without that immediate response and the demands it makes on the dancer, the dance

might well undergo a qualitative change. Also since television programmes have a time limitation of, say, 30 or 40 minutes, the leisurely long recitals may have to be trimmed and adapted to the needs of the medium. In India, like everywhere else, the professional competence (or lack of it) and the expertese (or lack of it) of the producers on the mass media are problems which have to be watched. Through video-recording and exchange of programmes and, above all, by the use of the satellite, television can serve as a medium for better inter-regional understanding of classical forms. This will depend however, on the time factor, the limitations of available channels and a host of factors. Intelligent and imaginative use of the medium and the diversification of programmes with the greatest subtlety and discrimination are essential if television has to make its fullest impact.

In the training of the dancer, technological media can be of immense help. A few institutions in India have already acquired video cameras and they are using video camera in their composition work. Video cameras can be of immense help also for the solo dancer, because of the paucity of time and attention on the part of the teacher. The dancer can use the video camera for self-criticism, and as an aid it can be of the utmost utility. It can play an equally important role in the cultivation of tastes through lecture demonstration on television and other forms of mass media. Whether the lecture demonstrations are through the verbal medium or through the bare image or with a socio-geographical background, these lecture demonstrations can stimulate further interest and can cultivate and develop the tastes of urban and rural audiences.

However, in such matters television, even a satellite television, will have to struggle against polluting forces at work via mass media like the commercial films. This category of kinetic composition is neither fish nor fowl. But for a few

exceptions, hardly any authentic classical dances or folk, tribal dances have been used in the films. The dances are either catchy, popular without a distinctive character, or are introduced in order to serve the purpose of a hero-heroine meeting, the choice of a bride, or the coming of a major disaster like a theatre fire. This mass industry has been responsible for corrupting tastes of the movie-goers by serving to them adnauseam composite dances at the lowest artistic levels. A major reform is called for in this direction. Perhaps with enlightened taste and the making of many more art films, some welcome reform will also be seen in the dances included. So far the only commendable work on Dance has been a few documentaries made by the Films Division of India.

The dance traditions of India, therefore, present a varied picture characterised by the proverbial complexity of the Indian sub-continent. The problems which these traditions face in relation to the mass media are not very different from the problems which are faced by the musical traditions or the traditional theatre of India. A technical explosion in T.V., Radio, and audio-visual technology does pose a danger. This can be averted if technical media is used for preservation, for documentation and for dissemination of traditional values, content and form which may seem anachronistical but which have a contemporaneous validity. Alternately, the whole culture can succumb to the path of least resistence and let technology take over, so that a link with the heritage is broken once and for all. If the latter happens, it will be unfortunate, for then India, instead of learning from the experience of the West, will make the same mistakes to learn the same lessons; alas, there is no time. It will be too late. No amount of self-conscious effort to re-establish "Do it yourself" diversified and individual or small group conceived programmes will be a fitting substitute for the rich, varied, ever rejuvenating dance culture, which exists and whose survival or extinction lies in our hands.

TRADITIONAL THEATRE OF INDIA AND MEDIA OF MASS COMMUNICATION

by

J.C. Mathur

India's traditional theatre cannot be divided into ritual and secular forms. A performance may begin with rituals meant to propitiate the deities who protect the theatre. But the drama itself has no ritualistic significance. All drama, whether classical-Sanskrit or vernacular-traditional, has its origins in Bharata's *Natya Shastra,* the earliest work on dramaturgy (about 200 B.C.). The dramatic principles laid down in that text apply to every age. Bharata laid down that the theatre shall show the life and character of all manners of people, humans, gods, demons, saints, etc. In it will be depicted at various places, religious duties, precepts for people in general, amusement and sport, pursuit of wealth, propagation of peace and warfare. It will be full of righteousness for all, will promote fame, bring longevity, expand intelligence and be a source of teaching to the common people.

On this basis drama was regarded as the fifth *Veda.* The four *Vedas* not being accessible to the common people, specially to the *Shudras**, drama was developed to give them knowledge and information. Variety was introduced in this fifth

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* The lowest of the four traditional castes.

Veda by borrowing the text from the *Rigveda,* the song from the *Sama Veda,* acting from the *Yajurveda* and delectable sentiment from the *Atharva Veda.* Again, in order to qualify as the fifth *Veda,* it was equipped with all kinds of arts and crafts.

This complete instrument of entertainment and ethics was ignored by the classical Sanskrit drama. The latter was meant for the aristocracy. It had no ethical purpose. Only the epilogue usually prayed for peace and harmony among all. It had not much of song, and even less of dance. It was by no means the people's theatre.

The common people's theatre took shape in the period from about 1000 A.D. to 1550 A.D. Need was felt for switching over from Sanskrit — the language of the elite — to *Bhasha,* the language of the common people. Kulashekhara Varman of Kerala took the lead. *Koodiyattam,* the temple-drama of Trichur in Kerala was popularised by Kulashekhara Varman who permitted the rendering in Malayalam of every important piece of Sanskrit dialogue. In presenting the Malayalam rendering, the *Vidushaka* (jester) was given the freedom to interpret meanings of words so as to expose secrets of the court, to criticise misconduct, or to convey a message. These diversions transformed the text into one of significance to the people and of meaning to contemporaneity.

Some three centuries later, in another part of the country, Mithila, a further sharp departure from the Sanskrit text took place. For the court of the Mithila ruler Harsimha Deva, playwright Umapati Upadhyaya wrote *Parijat Haran.* The Sanskrit Prakrit text of the play was interspersed with songs in *Bhasha.* The *Raaga* and *taala* of every song was mentioned. It was obvious that some of the songs were meant to be accompanied by dance. These plays are called the *Kirtaniya*

Naat of Mithila and Nepal.

Songs in deshi *Bhasha* in the midst of serious drama caught on very well. Another step was taken by Mahapurush Shankardeva of Assam (about 1518 A.D.) who introduced even the prose dialogue in *Bhasha.* The transformation was complete. Mahapurush Shankar Deva and his pupil Madhava Deva wrote several plays built around the pranks *(lilas)* of Shri Krishna. The presentation itself was designed to involve tribal drummers who would give a powerful and fantastic prologue. Deft intervening of songs and dances made these *Satriya* performances of the Assam Valley a complete aesthetic experience.

Shankardeva used drama as a medium for conveying the message of his Vaishnava creed. Such deliberate use of this medium had never before been attempted. In order to wean away the people from excesses of indulgence in the senses, from dependence on power, pride and sex, Shankardeva would show Lord Krishna — the complete *avatara* — in all His splendour or *aishwarya,* and as the embodiment of *Kamadeva* — the God of love. Face to face with such climacteric experience on the stage, the *bhakta* or devotee in the audience would realize how puny were his own indulgences. It was a kind of catharsis in the reverse. Shankardeva and his disciples would know the right moment in the play when the message could be driven home. Usually it would be near the acme of the pleasurable sentiment in the play. Lord Krishna, the supreme lover in the embrace of his young consort Satyabhama; at the height of love-play, the *Sutradhar* (Director) would step forward and addressing the audience, would suddenly remind them that what they were witnessing was the love-play of none other than the Lord of the Universe, one, to meditate on whom even for a moment, would suffice to relieve one of all earthly anxieties. The moment of communicating this message is important. That is the moment up to which the playwright builds up the erotic

sentiment or the *Shringar rasa,* step by step through the awakening of the senses, creating for his audience such perfect illusion that the spectator is momentarily caught in a suspension of his ego following a benumbing of his satiated senses. That is the moment when the ego is no longer an impediment to the reception of the message.

This technique of communicating the message is important for understanding not only Shankardeva's *Vaishnava* plays (or *Ankiya Naats,* as they are now called) but also the *Raasleela* of Braj, the land believed to be Krishna's home (near Mathura). The *Raas leela* as staged now, originated round about 1540 A.D., when the holy land of Braj was visited by a number of devotees and saints from different parts of India. The beginnings of the peaceful reign of the Mughals gave them an opportunity to identify the various spots supposed to be associated with the pranks or *leelas* of Krishna in his young age, as mentioned in the *Shreemadbhagwat Purana* and other *Puranas.* A *leela* provides the episode for the stage-play which is invariably preceded by a *Raas* or circular group-dance of Krishna with his milkmaid friends in the enchanting woods of Braj, on the bank of the river Yamuna. Beginning as a cycle of miracle plays, the *Raas Lilas* soon grew into a professional form. Stage property is minimal. Costumes of Krishna and his principal consort Radha are bright and colourful. No front curtain is visualised though an inner apartment is often revealed behind a backcloth or *pichhvai.* The stage usually juts out into the audience. The chorus sits on one side of the jutting out portion of the stage. A peculiarity is that the principal characters are all young boys — below the age of 14 years. This restriction is enforced very strictly, even though the episodes do not always relate to Krishna's childhood. The dance is simple but the songs are classical, the chorus taking over every now and then so as to give breathing time to the players. The players are deeply conscious of their divine role. Off and on,

in elaboration of the *padas* of saints, they utter philosophical interpretations in language at once simple and elevating.

The success of *Raas Leelas* stimulated such forms of devotional theatre in regional languages in different parts of the country. The *Yaksha Gana* in Karnatak and Andhra Pradesh (not so clearly demarcated in those days), as well as *Dodatta,* are performances based on legends in the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas.* Kuchipudi of village Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh and *Bhagwat Mela* of village Melattur in Tanjore District of Tamil Nadu have much in common with each other. In most of these performances those portions of mythology were preferred which gave scope for showing the clash of evil and good, the eternal battle between the forces of darkness and those of light. One can detect also an attempt to accommodate scenes in which tribal life seems to be drawn into the orbit of Hinduism. A favourite scene is that showing Shiva as the *Nishad,* hunter, who humbles Arjuna the great Pandava warrior.

This shift from the romantic pranks of Krishna to the Lord's role as the defender of his devotees and as the protector of suffering humanity from tyrants intoxicated with their earthly power, was manifested pointedly in the *Rama Leela.* Rama's epical battle with Ravana, the proud King of demons is shown on a large stage or in an extensive fenced area. In *Nrisingha-leela* of Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh and Melattur (Tamil Nadu), the Lord appears in a lion's body, tearing open a stone-pillar and saving the young devotee Prahlad from his unrepentant and tyrannical father. In *Therukoothu,* the powerful street-play of Tamil Nadu, all the evil in Dushshasan wells up on the tyrant's face when he tries to disrobe Draupadi who is saved through prayers to the Lord.

The whole country resounded with the clangour of this

heroic drama, recalling the Lord in his ten *avataras* — the saviour to his devotees bringing hope and faith in the midst of surrounding darkness.

Jatra of Bengal opens a new dimension; the intensity of devotional love carries the music to lyrical heights. The plot is longer and more complex than in the *Raas Leela*. The heroic element of the *Ram Leela* is replaced by the romantic element from popular tales. And yet essentially *Jatra* is a passionately devotional drama in which the *kirtan*, group-singing of the name of the Lord, is often the climax.

What accounted for the prevalence of devotional drama during that period? The Mughals were patrons of music and dancing of the 'chamber' variety. But drama was forbidden for even the most liberal-minded of Muslims. And so in the vast region under Mughal rule drama could survive only under the shelter of the shrine. The shrines had hardly the resources of the patrons of ancient times. Yet they soon realised the immence power of dramatic performances for conveying the message of godliness, of faith and piety. Of the four ways of winning God's grace, — repeating his name *(kirtan* or *ghosha)*, worshipping the book *(Shrimadbhagwat)*, worshipping the image *(vigrah-pujan)* and witnessing the enactment of his playful acts and exploits *(Leela darshan)* — the saints of that period were drawn towards the last as the most effective medium of feeling God's presence. Krishna moved among the devotees at their behest as a child. Rama was the worthy son of the family next door. Grace came unasked to those that felt the proximity.

Could this be a mass-ritual for the spectators? No, it was too full of life for that. Indeed in basic dramaturgy, it is no different from the classical Sanskrit theatre. Indian dramatic tradition does not regard drama as imitation *(anukaran)* or even

as creation *(utpatti)*. It is the revelation and manifestation of aesthetic pleasure *(rasa)* through the process of suggestivity *(vyanjana)*. Suggestivity is achieved through ensuants and moods that are expressed through the language of gestures and expressions. It is thus not mass-ritual but mass-enjoyment, participational enjoyment.

The temple-environment was ideal. The music and dance of the court was adapted to the mass-uses of the temple courtyard or the fair at the place of pilgrimage. The dialogue and the story belonged to the shrine.

Towards the middle of the seventeenth century, a number of small Hindu Princes became independent or were allowed to gain and retain independence on the periphery of the Mughal Empire. The traditional theatre got a new patron. Krishna and his consort themselves became proto-types of amorous princes and princesses. Music became more sophisticated, dramaturgy was drawn towards brilliant and studied poetics. Stories of adventure and romance were revived. In Rajasthan in the Kuchamon, Chirawa and Mewar regions, the *Khyaal* emerged as a theatrical form with various styles under this patronage. Malwa's princes promoted *Maanch,* presented on a high stage with seats in the audience reserved for discriminating elders. In Mithila, the newly-created princedom of Darbhanga continued the tradition of Harsimhadeva and developed the *Kirataniya Naat* theatre. Tanjore and Madurai, down South had the highly artistic dynasty of the Nayaks followed by the Maratha princes in Sarfoji's line. Themselves playwrights (both men and women), these minor rulers encouraged various groups of Telugu and Tamil theatre, and amalgamated musical and dance styles of the North with those of the South. The Nayaks were responsible for the growth of the *Bhagwat Mela* of Melattur. Sarfoji's family gave the open-air and acoustically nearly perfect theatre in Saraswati Mahal, Tanjore. Two

plays in Hindi (Braj) have been found in the Saraswati Mahal library, the music being *Karnatak* and the dance closely following the temple sculpture of Chidambaram. During this period, the Christian (Portuguese) Governors of west coast (Malabar) promoted the only surviving Christian drama of India, The *Chavittu Natakam,* full of stylistic battle-dances built around the crusades. Up in the North, Kashmir had about this time perhaps the only Muslim theatre of India — the *Bhand Jashna.* Very probably the performers were originally Hindus, allowed by more liberalized Muslim rulers to continue their art and even encouraged by them.

Patronage by the little courts did not result in the traditional theatre returning to the precious and sumptuous format of the classical Sanskrit theatre. For one thing, that format had in its entirety survived in the texts on dramaturgy only. The only continuous tradition of performances in Sanskrit was in Kerala *(Koodiyattam)* which was actually the point of departure for the folk and traditional theatre. Those essentials of the Sanskrit theatre which were serviceable in changed conditions were in any case retained all through. What patronage brought was better plots, more identifiable characterization and certainly more refined songs and dances.

In the middle of the 19th century, a new wave was witnessed. The sermon or *updesh* became a popular mode of communication with the masses. Its popularity arose with the *Bhajaneeks* of the Arya Samaj, a reformist movement among the Hindus of West Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab. The subject-matter of the sermons given by the *Bhajneeks* was ethical and the glorification of their creed. Some *Ras-leelas* adopted the practice, and put in the mouth of Shri Krishna a straightforward sermon, clothed, of course, in attractive and intimate language and figures of speech.

As reformism spread, the folk and traditional theatre became a willing vehicle of social criticism. Social evils like unequal marriages (child-brides tied to aged men or immature bridegrooms with grown-up brides), the tyranny of landlords, the quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the deplorable conduct of *Sadhus* and mendicants — these were only some of the evils that came to be pitilessly dissected and ridiculed in *Sang* or *Swang* of Haryana and west Uttar Pradesh, *Bhavai* of Gujarat, *Tamasha* of Maharashtra and *Bidesia* of Bihar. The general form of the plays remained more or less unchanged. But the music increasingly absorbed popular and lively tunes. A srtong impact of these forms on the commercial theatre financed by the Parsis in Western India was perceptible. Gradually this commercial theatre, followed later by the cinema, captured the attention of the urban classes. The traditional theatre was relegated increasingly to the rural areas. This made it increasingly the entertainment as well as the means of self-expression for the common people of the villages.

Having passed through these historical phases, each leaving its effect, the folk and traditional theatre of India has acquired some common characteristics which shine through the differences of language and background. In the first place music, dance and dialogue are all essential elements of this theatre. There is an interesting reference in the fourth chapter of Bharata's great work — *Natya Shastra.* When Bharata, at the instance of Brahma (the creator among the Hindu Trinity) produced two plays called *Amria-manthan* and *Tripurdah* he had not included any dances in them. It was Lord Shiva (the Destroyer among the Trinity, as well as the originator of Dancing) who advised that instead of having pure acting, drama should include songs and dances also and said that such a mixture would lend variety to dramatic productions. Classical Sanskrit drama did not follow this precept. But it is obvious

that it was under frequent pressure of the popular liking for songs and dances. At a later date the practice of introducing the Dhruva songs of entrances and departures in Prakrit seems to have appealed to producers, as would appear from a stage-version of the highly lyrical IV-act of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvashiyam* attributed to the 8th century A.D.

It seems that this admixture of songs, dances and dialogues represents a variety that does not find mention in the classifications given in subsequent works of dramaturgy. From the common people there was a growng demand for this kind of complete entertainment which producers could not afford to ignore. A fresh wave of popularity came after the poet Jayadeva wrote his great work of rare lyrical and musical beauty — The *Geeta Govinda* — in the 12th century. Perhaps no single work has exercised a more powerful and widespread influence on subsequent dramatic forms than *Geeta Govinda*. Near about this time, the name *Sangeetaka* began to be used popularly for this mixed form of performing art. Maybe, *Sangeetaka* came initially as the producer's version of Sanskrit-Prakrit plays. But soon the poet-playwright had to respond to the pressure, and a form combining opera, ballet and straightforward dialogue became the order of the day. For a popular form and with actors and actresses no longer as literate and knowledgeable as in the past, the *Sangeetaka* had certain advantages. The songs only had to be learnt and the accompanying dances mastered. The dialogue could be impromptu. The choral group acted as the baseline of operations, as it were, to which the performers could return according to necessity. The songs were on element of continuity while the dialogue permitted improvisations.

Another common characteristic of these plays is that the language is a marked blend of the principal spoken language of the region and Sanskrit. The audience experiences the flavour

of literary Sanskrit along with the flexibility of the regional spoken tongue — or *Bhasha*.

Music in these plays is composed in the modes or *ragas* of the classical style, as well as in the *deshi* or regional style. Echoes of South Indian *ragas* have been noticed far out in the north.

Costumes — dating mostly to the early Mughal period — have much in common. Long overalls are worn by the *Sutradhar* in Kashmir, Assam and Tamil Nadu alike. Masks are a common feature practically all over the country.

Another common feature is the question-answer type of dialogue, a tradition going back to the Mahabharata's Yaksha-Yudishthir dialogue and coming down through Buddhist and Jaina literature.

In practically every form of traditional drama, the *Poorva-Ranga* or the introduction is of primary importance. It is the most pervasive feature of this drama, the one in which not only are the principal characters introduced but also the theme and the message of the play. There is a certain amount of rituals too, prayers to deities specially associated with the performing arts. But above all, *Poorva Ranga* establishes direct communication between the *Sutradhar* (Director) and the audience.

The *Sutradhar* is present in these plays throughout. He intervenes between the audience and the performers at every stage, thus advancing the action, stimulating interest and explaining and interpreting conduct and situations. He is assisted in this task by the *Vidushak* or the court-jester and by the chorus.

Stylised acting, use of gestures and *mudras* along with stresses and ups and downs in speech are all common devices to build up emotional climax, and produce a gamut of aesthetic pleasures. Acting being stylised, excellence lies not in producing individualistic distinctness but in giving to the types authenticity in behaviours.

Despite development since the 15th century, the traditional theatre of India has remained a poor man's theatre. production costs are low, yet the average spectator is able to have the most complete entertainment. The one expensive item is the costume. Costumes are colourful and eye-catching so as to make spectacular scenic effects and property superfluous.

Though traditional theatre adheres to mythological themes, romantic tales and sometimes contemporary stories, there is a constant awareness of contemporary problems and issues. *Sang* and *Nautanki* of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana and *Koodiyattam* of Kerala are particularly noted for this awareness and the willingness to admit contemporary references.

No opportunity is lost of drawing a moral from a given situation. In these plays, ethics are the fulcrum of social stability and family-conduct. Propriety of conduct assumes norms that enable the average man or woman to survive the storms of traumatic personal experiences. There are thus no doubts or misgivings over those norms.

Heroes and heroines are not sought among noble and royal families only. Tejaji, the hero of Rajasthan's *Khyaal* is from an ordinary family. Not birth but heroic conduct makes them respected.

In most of these plays, misdeeds and social evils are

sharply criticised and exposed without hesitation. Petty officials, dishonest courtiers and even British rulers are not spared. The theatre is the people's court, as it were.

The erotic elements in these plays are expressed without inhibition. Indeed passion of the senses is central to the love-episodes. No platonic love, no love without sex, and yet no exhibition of acts of love, not even kissing. Language can be downright earthy.

In these performances a very intimate relationship exists between the audience and performers. Audience participation is often a common feature but it is done very spontaneously. In a *Ras Leela* performance, the audience may respond to the *Sutradhar's* call to do *Hari-kirtan;* in a *Kariala* performance, some among the audience might accost *dramatis personae* passing through their midst.

In the traditional theatre of India during the last 500 years and today, one can see a fulfilment of the basic objectives Bharata had in view while defining the purpose of the theatre. Here was the expression of the sentiments of the general public, the portrayal of the character of people from different sections and the promotion of the good, the enjoyment and the interests of the people in general. Lord Buddha's words "for the good of the many, for the happiness of the numerous" seem to apply to the traditional theatre. The Sanskrit classical theatre, though aware of this objective of drama, was unable to achieve it, because the means it employed did not correspond to the objective. The fact is that the means found adequate at the time of the adoption of any objectives, may not necessarily remain effective later. Traditional theatre on the other hand has had flexible texts of dramaturgy. In the expression of the emotions of the many, in the portrayal of the characters of people from numerous groups and in carrying the message of

righteous conduct to the masses, the traditional theatre, has become a medium of mass communication.

But it differs from modern media of mass communications in two respects. First, it seeks to stimulate aesthetic pleasure among the audience through a blend of acting, dance, songs and dialogue. In modern media the object is not to stimulate aesthetic pleasure but to produce a charismatic effect and sharpen the individuality of character. Again traditional theatre dwells on the propriety of conduct, thought and expression, while the best of modern media steer clear of ethics.

Here, then, are two kinds of mass media, and it is natural that we should look for the points at which they are relevant to each other. Of the modern electronic media, the radio heralded in some respects the return to the oral culture. The radio in India was from the beginning in need of the musical play. It went down well with the audience who could remember the tunes even though the characters could not be seen. In fact the absence of the visuals intensified the aural appeal. The radio came at a time when the intelligentsia living in towns had got used to the picture-frame stage, naturalistic dialogue and realistic property. The written word was predominant, and the educated people had lost contact with the flexible language of the rural people. Consequently, the demand of the radio for the musical play had to be met by inventing a kind of recitative play in the written language. This recitative play called *Dhwani-roopak* in Hindi, did not succeed in creating the atmosphere of communication. As stated earlier, a variety of sentiments creates the aesthetic pleasure (rasa) under the spell of which a large mass of audience receives the message of a *Sangeetak*. The nuances of the spoken language, the pace of the song and the diversity of the musical

modes, build up the mood which is absent from the *Dhwani-roopak.*

It was only when the number of radio stations in India increased, and programmes could be heard in villages, that in the name of 'minority' programmes for the rural people, short excerpts of the traditional dramatic performances were introduced on the radio. Much was lost in the process of abbreviation and studio editing. The voice of the performers is usually on the higher notes so that it may be heard without the aid of the modern device of loudspeaker, above the humming of large crowds. Apart from this technical drawback, the need to cut down the repetitions interrupts the building up of the emotional environment. However, even these edited excerpts provided to rural audiences an entertainment which they could enjoy.

To the urban listener the experience brought with it two kinds of enrichment. The clear enunciation of words in the songs has been instrumenal in rehabilitating the importance of the text in music. In northern India during the last 300 years, the text of classical songs became subsidiary in singing; the clever manipulation of the voice in an ornamental way came to be regarded as the height of virtuosity. Actually, much of the music that has come down to us was originally dramatic music. Chamber music in the Mughal Court was not concerned much with the contents, its message or its drama. In the broadcasts of these bits, the story behind words was echoed.

Radio broadcasts unfolded the poetry in traditional drama. Dramatic action arises not merely from characterisation and situations. It springs also from poetic diction, figures of speech and flights of imagination, each providing its internal suspense and denoument that one associates with drama. The oral culture of the radio has rehabilitated literature in the

spoken word. Heard poetry, formerly the delight of assemblies of connoisseurs, now pleases thousands of listeners at the same time.

Broadcasts on the radio have also brought out the common elements in the various regional forms of traditional theatre. This has immense educational value. But the educational purpose is best served by combining the visual with the audio medium. A students' group listening to the broadcast of a traditional play, should be able to see slides depicting various situations, characters and dance poses. A combination of the radio and slides would make the audio-visual experience complete.

Recordings on tape originally for the radio, have facilitated the preservation of the current styles of the traditional theatre. They can also enable the purity of the styles to be maintained, during a period in which exposure to the fast-moving electronics media have often vulgarised tastes of audiences in the name of modernization.

Is the film a better means of keeping a record of the various styles of the traditional theatre? The documentaries produced by the Films Division of the Government of India are an authentic record, though not necessarily a detailed one. The National Academy (Sangeet Natak Akademi) has filmed on the locale more detailed and unedited versions showing every sequence, every shade of the make-up, every colour of the costume. The film here is an asset to the archives, not a medium of mass communication. As a mass medium it has to consider the needs and receptivity of the audience. Where the audience consists of learners, the role of the film is to be instructional. The details may be cut out but directions may be incorporated in the re-arranged material anticipating the stages through which the actors have to pass and

providing pauses during in which the instructor can watch the learners imitate the various sequences. As an instructional aid, the film and the video-tape are similar in use. In fact the video-tape is more suitable because repetition is so much easier. That apart, the nature of the contents would be the same. The first audience group that is in need of instruction would be the traditional theatre groups themselves. At present little is being done to teach them choreography, to warn them against the vulgar trappings of mechanized aids, to acquaint them with the virtues of editing to suit the convenience of present day audiences. If these troupes are to survive, they have to be enabled to flourish in their own settings. Neither the films in the archives nor scholarly studies by cultural anthropologists would prolong their existence. Centralized training would mean the absorption of these forms by the more powerful modern forms. Their own environments are being invaded by the worst and rejected feature films on the commercial market. The remedy lies therefore in using the latest audio-visual aids for a massive self-improvement and self-preservation programme for traditional drama troupes. The training should be with the triple purpose of immunising them against the blandishments of modern crudities, enabling them to make the minimum adjustments in duration, choreography and decor essential for present day productions; and finally, to gradualise the process of the inevitable change, so that the transition is not unnaturally hasty and keeps pace with the sociological and economic changes, which in a society like that of India have been slower than the sudden transformation of the media of mass communications.

The degrading magic of the neon lights and the microphone have already begun to distort the centuries-old street-cum-shrine theatre of Melattur near Tanjore in South India. On the other extreme is the *Ram Lila* in Kashi (near Varanasi in northern India) where the uncompromising orthodoxy of

the Maharaja (still the patron) has resisted even the democratization of the arrangements for the audience. Nonetheless, the Kashi Theatre is unique in the world; it would be a pity if its conventions of the audience moving physically from one scene to another, of the chorus singing from the text in the dim light of the oil lamp, of the characters speaking in a stylized way without microphone to a vast, attentive and silent concourse, were to be given up.

Can modern theatre people be assisted by films to evolve a new contemporary form? A production of Brecht in an Indian language would no doubt gain from the adoption of some conventions of India's traditional theatre. But the other attempts to introduce opera or ballet have somehow not struck roots. True, in *Nautanki* — with some of the professional voices — there are germs of an opera. Manipuri dances have given to the group in Triveni Kala Sangam suggestions of abstract ballet form. But the basic inspiration in those cases have been the European performing arts. Only in a very recent play — *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad — has an attempt been made to blend in the genuine Indian style, song, dialogue and dance into a single production. It would not be surprising if the earlier experience that Karnad had in the production of his film *Samskara* in which folk items are a part of the environment, had something to do with his experiment on the stage.

In a 14th century work, Jyotirishwar Thakur of the Nepal Court had laid down instructions for the *natas* and *natis* in compressed *shlokas*. Works like these as well as the temple-sculpture of Chidambaram have helped the dance-instructor. That accounts for the revival and continuance today of the pure dance forms. Neither sculpture nor texts are competent to communicate the directions for the revival of the structure of the *Sangitaka* — the blended form of the song,

dance and dialogue. The film and the video-tape are the appropriate aids. Training is to be not merely of the producer. It should reach the writer as also the actor who has to go back to the pre-playback singers standard of versatility.

In one respect the Indian film itself has been a vehicle for the continuance of some of the features of traditional drama of India without meaning to do so. Many an observer has been intrigued by the prolific songs and dances in Indian films based on modern stories and contemporary situations. These songs swell up like myriad springs, uncalled for by the dramatic situation. The only way in which some of the heroines would seem to be able to give expression to their emotions of love is through sprightly steps; tear-jerking situations are brought to the brink by mournful tunes. Song and dance seem to constitute the texture of environment of Indian films. The genesis of this perversity is perhaps the undercurrent of the language of drama which the Indian audience has known all these centuries, the language that has a blend of dance, song and dialogue and that flows unsuspected by those who introduced new media and the realistic theatre. Even when the picture-frame stage was introduced by the commercial Parsi theatre back in the middle of the 19th century, neither the ritual of the *Poorva Rang,* that is, the introductory prayer songs, nor occasional dances could be discarded. The complete entertainment is what people have been used to witness. The actor or actress is also able to fulfil his/her role if allowed the use of the three idioms, singing, dancing and speech. That is how the climax of the emotional experience is built up and the personality of the spectator reaches that state of 'egolessness' in which the message of the communicator becomes acceptable.

Thus neither the Parsi theatre nor the commercial film has been able altogether to go against the Indian genius. But,

what they achieved in the bargain was not an aesthetic blend but often a repulsive hotch-potch. It should be the role of the mass media under the direction of men of taste to stimulate the return to the truly artistic Indian form. Very recently some promising attempts have been made. Habib Tanvir put on the Delhi stage a group of traditional dance performers from the Raipur District of Madhya Pradesh. Their leader is a Panwari (who earns his living by selling betal leaves). The ease and smoothness with which he passes from a dance number to a song and then to a smart piece of prose dialogue is in the true tradition of old *Natas*. The message that he manages to communicate, the social criticism which he gets away with, the moralistic preachings in which he indulges without seeming to do so are all part of a strange artful process, subtle and spontaneous. When this artist learnt his skill, there were no modern mass media to help him. But his son and his younger colleagues live in a different world. They are liable to acquire other kinds of skills through these media and forget or look down upon, the skills of their leader. It is for the modern mass media to adopt them and to communicate them, with all the subtleties they are capable of, to the new generation. The training environments of the new generation of atrists are shaped by the modern media and anything that is excluded by them has little chance of continuance.

The film and the video-tape are undoubtedly more effective than the radio and the gramophone record as a training device. But, because of the distance involved in all projection-media, they are unable to produce the intimate experience in the communication of a *rasa,* that is, aesthetic pleasure. In this respect, television is more competent. A TV performer steps into the personality of the viewer at a most receptive and intense moment. Marshal McLuhan regards a TV programme as a tactile experience. The breath of the performer awakens your senses. He is in your drawing room, chatting to you and

conveying not only through the voice but through the entire nervous system. With the senses awakened, the spectator receives the message both through the conscious and unconscious processes. So far, very few traditional theatre artists have been given opportunity on the Delhi TV.

Within the next five years, TV programmes will be broadcast from Bombay, Srinagar, Calcutta, Madras and possibly Kanpur and Ahmedabad. A satellite will be available as an instrument of cultural understanding, aesthetic integration, and the finer values of life. The best of the traditional theatre will be carried over the satellite from the broadcasting centres, and will become known all over the country. It will become part of thousands, if not millions of homes and clubs. Puna Ram, the gifted performer from Madhya Pradesh will be able to convey the message of *Gita,* to recreate the battle field with Arjun and Krishna on one side, and the Kauravas on the other and to confront the lost generation of today with the challenge of *Purushartha.* When Puna Ram was first presented on the Delhi stage last winter, one could see that in him the media of mass communication had acquired a powerful spark.

For too long have we allowed our traditional arts to remain under the microscope of anthropologists and recondite scholars of linguistics and dramaturgy. They need now to be placed before the glass that projects and the electric dots that envelops the viewer. They must be made a part of the texture of modern technology and cease to remain merely museum pieces.

But in this modernisation they should not lose the ageless spirit of beauty that their own environment has given them. They must be enabled to exist and prosper in their own environment. The media of mass communication should go to them

and the fees given by them should be their mainstay for continuing their own local festivals and cycle of plays in the midst of the community, so that they change with the gradual pace of the community and not the violent upheavals of urban life.

TRADITIONAL FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT AND THE CINEMA

by

M. V. Krishnaswami

The purpose and scope of this article is to examine the impact of the cinema on the traditional performing arts in India.

The history of the Indian cinema is very meagrely documented; reliable, authentic statistics are not readily available and there has been no systematic scientific evaluation of the sociological influences of the cinema in India. What follows, therefore, are essentially personal views.

Such is the diversity of India, such are its contradictions and paradoxes, that no individual can claim even today that he knows all about India. The mosaic of regional variety and variations is such that it is often said that forty centuries co-exist in India and that a journey in this country is a journey in space and time. The statement that there is unity and a certain basic harmony despite all the apparent and obvious diversity in the country, is no mere platitude. Perceptive and sympathetic souls who have extensively travelled and studied the country in depth, have expressed and explained such ideas in very vivid and poetic terms.

It is necessary to remember this aspect, this reality of the country while discussing any subject concerned with it.

While the Indian cinema is barely sixty years old, the performing arts — Music, Dance and Drama — have centuries of old traditions behind them. In the case of Dance and Music the tradition has been continuous, almost unbroken over a period of nearly thirty centuries.

As against the antiquity of these arts, the cinema made its appearance in India in the last decade of the 19th century. It would be thus seen that the transition of entertainment in India from its traditional forms to those of mass communication media is a recent phenomenon.

In order to provide ourselves with a proper perspective for the consideration of the main subject, it is best that we start with a brief history of the Indian cinema.

The beginnings of the cinema in India are contemporaneous with those in the west. The cinema came to India in 1896, when the Lumiere Brothers' films were shown in Bombay. As in other countries, the thrill, the wonder, and the fascination that the moving pictures generated in the spectators made the films immediately successful and immensely popular.

Sakharam Bhatwadekar was one of the spectators, who came, who saw and was conquered by the fascination of this medium. He was so deeply impressed by the magic and marvel of this new medium, that he got a camera from London and made some factual converges on subjects such as wrestling, and the training of circus monkeys. He also made a "newsreel" of the home-coming of the well-known Indian mathematician R.P. Paranjpye from Cambridge.

Some others, attracted by the business advantages of exhibition that the medium provided, developed and exploited the "tent cinema" idea.

Among them was a prop boy in a theatre in Calcutta, J.F. Madan, who established cinemas in rapid succession, and gradually developed a film empire, culminating in a virtual monopoly of the trade. Madan's empire flourished till the coming of sound. It disintegrated soon afterwards.

All the films exhibited in those early years came from outside India. They came from France, from the prolific Pathe concern, from the U.S.A., from Britain and a number of continental countries which were active film producers in those days. This situation lasted for more than a decade until the resourceful and enterprising Dadasaheb Phalke appeared on the Indian film horizon.

Phalke is a very important name in Indian film history. Until recently he was considered to be the maker of the first Indian feature film. It has now been established that "Pundalik" a film by R.G. Toiney and N.G. Chitre was made a year earlier, that is, in 1912. This historical discovery apart, the importance of Phalke as a significant pioneer can neither be disputed nor gainsaid. He came of a priestly family. His father was an eminent Sanskrit scholar. Phalke was trained for a hereditary career but his basic interests lay elsewhere. He was deeply interested in painting, sculpture, in the theatre, and in prestidigitation. He studied at the J.J. School of Art, Bombay, the art school Kalabhavan at Baroda and even worked for a while as photographer with the Government Archaeological Department. He established an Art Press, with equipment imported from Germany. The year was 1909. In 1911, after he had regained his vision as dramatically as he had lost it, he happened to see at a Christmas film show, a picture on

the life of Christ. This inspired him with the immediate, insistent and almost obsessive thought that Indian mythological stories, in particular the lives of Lord Krishna and Rama, should be presented through the medium of the cinema.

The quick decisions and actions that followed, matched his determination. He went to England and came back in 1912 with a Williamson camera, and all other accessory equipment for film making, and a good deal of knowledge and information about the techniques of film making. With his own financial resources, for no one else would come forward to support his project, he made a short film by the technique of time lapse photography of the growth of a peaseed into a full-fledged plant. His wife encouraged him in his film work all through, and gave him the fullest moral and material support. Phalke himself has acknowledged in touching terms, how much he was beholden to her in whatever he achieved in life in general, and the film field in particular. The success of the 'pea' film got Phalke financial backers for the feature film project he had in mind, but even then he had innumerable other obstacles to surmount. The cinema and theatre were taboo as immoral professions. Working for them, particularly as actors or actresses, was considered socially disrespectable. Women would not come forward to play any role in films. This attitude to the cinema persisted even in the forties, though it was not as pronounced as in the early days. A young man played the role of the heroine in *"Raja Harischandra"*, Phalke's first feature film. This story from the *Mahabharata* has been eternally popular with Indian audiences. Harischandra is a sort of Indian Job who faces all trials and tribulations inflicted on him, and emerges triumphant and unscathed in his adherence to Truth and Honesty. The film was an overwhelming success and its impact was tremendous. It is said that Indian spectators prostrated before the screen when the Gods appeared on the screen even as Western spectators had recoiled with fear when they

saw the train steaming head on, on the screen, in Lumiere's film.

Phalke made a number of successful films, almost all on mythological themes. Altogether he made nearly a hundred films. He was a remarkable person. He tried animation, experimented with colour, used models, persuaded women to act in the cinema, was producer, director, actor, technician; in short he was a versatile, multifaceted, fascinating personality. He tried his hands at sound films but failed. Despite all his early success, he withdrew from the film field in disguest as he saw more craze for money than any sincere interest in the art of the film or films with a purpose. In 1944, he died, poor and unknown. Phalke's colourful career reminds one irresistibly of that famous name of cinema, George Melies of France.

Dhiren Ganguly was a person who studied at Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan and studied and practised photography with a passion. He became associated with J.F. Madan mentioned earlier, and made a rollicking and successful comedy *England Returned.* The film mocked and laughed both at the artificial ways of westernised Indians and the inhibitions of the conservative ones at home. Another historical film of his, *Razia Begam* landed him in trouble because of the way he treated Hindu-Muslim relations in the film. He told the story of a Muslim Queen and her love for a Hindu subject. In the political arena, the relationship between the two communities was rather strained at that time (1924). This was particularly so in the princely state of Hyderabad ruled by the Nizam, where such a treatment was anathema and the film was promptly banned. Ganguly was externed from the state where he used to live.

Back in Bengal, he met Debaki Bose, whom he hired to

script and direct a film which was entitled "Flames of Flesh".

Debaki Bose, who came of a rich family left his studies during the non-cooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. And when he opted for the cinema as a career, his family disinherited him. The loss of the family was the gain of the Indain cinema. Debaki Bose lived on to the sound era (in fact he died only recently) and he made some very good, interesting and successful films, and made a name for himself as a director of quality and sensitivity.

Chandulal Shah is another important name of those times. He came to the cinema under strange circumstances. He was working at the Stock Exchange. He stepped in to complete the work of a Director who had been immobilised by a fractured ankle. When he took over as director, he left the subject of the original film, developed his own scenario overnight and finished the film to a deadline date despite a fever of 104°! Such a performance naturally astounded the producer and it also delighted him when he found the film was a great commercial success. It was a typical sentimental, "social" film. The title of the film was *Gunasundari*. It may be translated as a "Virtuous beauty" or "a woman whose virtue is her beauty" but it was given an amusing and provocative English title: "Why husbands go astray"! Gohar, the leading lady of this film, and Sulochana whom Chandulal Shah introduced in his next film, were among the leading glamour girls of the Indian silent cinema. Chandulal Shah came to stay in the cinema. He made more than a hundred films, founded a studio, was immensely successful monetarily and was one of the important pillars of the Indian cinema during his days which lasted almost up to the end of the Second World War.

One of the most important and interesting films of the silent era was Himansu Rai's "Light of Asia". It was the story

of the life of the Buddha. The text used for sub-titles in English in the film was that of Edwin Arnold. The film was co-produced with Emelka of Germany and was a big success, both at home and abroad. It helped Himansu Rai to make two more films, *Shiraz* and *The Throw of the Dice*. It was at the time of the last film that Devika Rani met Himansu Rai and later married him. They established the Bombay Talkies which earned a reputation as one of the great banners in the Indian cinema.

The first World War which disrupted European film production and crippled it, helped a big expansion of the American film. There was a big influx of American films into India by 1925. Eightyfive percent of the films shown in India were American. The reason for their popularity is not far to seek when we realise that the popular stars of those days were Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.

Even as efforts were being made by the British to curb this American monopoly, the talkies had been born. This event changed the complexion of the cinema radically. It affected the character and composition of the Indian cinema too. In spite of all the technical and organisational problems that the introduction of sound posed, the Indian cinema slided into the Talkie era quickly and smoothly and the first talkie *Alam Ara* in Hindi, made by Ardeshir Irani in 1931, was released with astonishing success. Only two years earlier, the first talkie — *Melody of Love* from the U.S.A. — had been shown in India.

Alam Ara was followed by an extraordinary period of production of talkies in several regional languages — Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Gujarati. All the films were received well and all made money. This was too good to be true and yet it was so. It also reflected the craze of the public for the new form of entertainment.

The protection for the Indian cinema against foreign competition sought for by a quota system and which had been cold-shouldered by officialdom, was overnight achieved by the use of regional languages and the initiation of the regional cinema.

With the advent of the talkie, a very important factor was the introduction of song, an element immensely popular with Indian audiences because of the musical traditions of the Indian stage and the basic love of the people for music.

It is said that in those early days there were films made with forty, fifty and even more songs! They were also long films which lasted for hours in the tradition of the all-night entertainment of folk drama in villages.

From the commencement of the Talkie era up to the beginning of the Second World War, a period which synchronised with the steady and ardent growth of nationalist aspirations and activities under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in the country, apart from the various regional cinemas and companies of secondary importance like Minerva and Ranjit, three important companies flourished both financially and artistically on a national scale. They were the Prabhat Film Company at Poona, the New Theatres at Calcutta and the Bombay Talkies at Bombay. The film industry in India became organised to a great extent in a rational way during the time of these companies. There was a big spurt in production, but the number of theatres was small, a little over 400 in 1931, and about 1200 in 1940. Nearly 50 per cent of the total films shown were foreign — mostly American and English.

The films of this period, though conventional in style in that they included songs and dances, were honest and

sincere in the treatment of their subjects, had a racy quality, showed a certain commitment and purpose in their selection of themes and approach to them, and above all, were to a very great extent free from the taint and contamination of the exclusively commercial values of the later wartime and post-war Indian cinema.

The famous directors of that period like Himansu Rai, B.N. Sircar, Bama, and Shantaram are among those who have a permanent niche in the history of the Indian Cinema. *Devadas, Achut Kanya, Duniya na mane, Ramashastry* are but some of the many outstanding and memorable films made during that period. The last one was a theme from Peshwa history and dealt with the uncompromising uprightness and integrity of Ram Shastry, the Chief Justice in the Peshwa Court. *Duniya na Mane* was the poignant story of a young girl married to an old man and the equanimity and will power with which she went through the ordeal thrust upon her. She remained faithful to her husband, but refused to share the conjugal bed with him. *Achut Kanya* tackled the problem of untouchability boldly by telling the story of a Brahmin boy's love for a pariah girl. *Devadas* based on one of the famous novels of Sarat Chandra Chatterji was a touching tale full of sentiment and pathos of a lover jilted by the girl he loves, through an arranged marriage.

During this decade, 1930-1940, for practical reasons, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras became three major centres of film production in the country. They continue to be so even today. During this period a significant factor was that producers and directors, not stars and distributors, were the dominant figures in the industry.

Around the year 1940, new money came into circulation because of the war. An expansion of employment in the army

and industry resulted in a greater purchasing power among the people. In the realm of the cinema there was a big influx of producers. Independent producers started offering competitive salaries to stars and started an era of free-lancing, an unhealthy, speculative trend. The comprehensive cohesive studio units disintegrated because of the reckless methods of the independent, speculative producers. Black money was introduced into the monetary veins of the cinema. This is playing havoc with the economics of the industry to this day. The vicious circle of mushrooming of productions, shortages, controls and taxes helped the chaotic tendencies to grow.

Independence, one thought piously, might put an end to such practices, solve all problems and restore the Indian cinema to a wholesome path. It did not. Such hopes were rendered vain partly because of the disinterest of some of the leaders in the Cinema and partly because of the crass illiteracy of the producers, and the general craze for easy money.

In 1948 *Chandralekha* was the harbinger of the formula film. Made by S.S. Vasan at the Gemini Studios, Madras, the film was a fantastic commercial success and it set the pace for a horde of imitators in manufacturing the 'formula' films. The formula film has been described as an omnibus entertainment film made to give what the public wants and made in a synthetic fashion — the recipe being stars, songs, swordfights, with a generous dose of sentiment, romance, tears and laughter.

Every producer tried to outdo the other in this type of film making. Despite Satyajit Ray and the new wave of films, formula reigns merrily even today, though in subtler and more sophisticated garbs.

Professor Toeplitz of Poland might have sounded un-

kind but he was truthful when he described this formula film as "Russian Salad". There were very few who attempted to go against this trend and current.

In the South, in spite of Southern linguistic regionalism, producers began to make Hindi films, invaded the Hindi market, and conquered it. They out-Hindied the Hindi producers in the formula recipe and block buster techniques. Big studios like Gemini, A.V.M., and Vauhini sprung up in the South. They played the sedulous ape to commercial Hollywood and succeeded tremendously.

This was the era that ushered in the star system and kept the industry captive under its powerful sway. This was the era of Raj Kapoor, Nargis, Dilip Kumar, Vyjayanthimala, Shivaji Ganesan, M.G. Ramachandran, N.T. Rama Rao, A. Nageswara Rao and a host of other lesser luminaries. Most of these stars still have a sway over the industry.

This period really stretches from 1948 to the present day and it is therefore difficult to list the many films or analyse them at length.

It must be said that though the strong current has been that of the formula film, there are names like Bimal Roy, K.A. Abbas and Hrishikesh Mukherjee who in some of their films have redeemed the Indian cinema in a small measure.

It is well known and an indisputable fact that with the appearance of Satyajit Ray on the Indian film horizon in 1955, the Indian cinema, particularly the regional cinema, has developed an artistic side and path. This has had considerable influence at home. It also brought Indian films international recognition.

The Government of India Film Institute at Poona (now the T.V. Institute also), started in 1960, has infused new blood into the Indian Cinema with its trained and talented technicians and artistes. The Film Society movement has also thrown up some sensitive and stimulating directors.

In the last decade, the development expansion and flowering of the regional cinema have been considerable and conspicuous.

The Indian Cinema today is one of the big industries in the country and India tops the world in film production this year. India makes films in more than a dozen languages and yet its potential for expansion is tremendous if you consider the vastness of the country and the size of its population.

From the foregoing brief survey, the history of the Indian cinema from its origin to the present day could be divided into the following periods mainly for the purposes of our present study of the mutual influence and interplay of the cinema and the traditional performing arts.

(i)	1896-1912	Introduction of the cinema to India and the early years.
(ii)	1912-1931	The birth of the Indian cinema and its achievements during the silent period.
(iii)	1931-1941	The advent of the Talkies; the first decade of the Talkies and the early war years.
(iv)	1941-1951	The war years — Independence and after.
(v)	1951-1961	The decade that ushers in Satyajit Ray.
(vi)	1961-1971	The advent of the Film Training Institute and after.

By the time the cinema came to India, British rule had become well established in the country and Victorian prudery had also percolated into the attitudes of the ruling and middle classes.

On the other hand, the reformist movements had also taken root and were very active. This along with the beginnings of the nationalist movement had started a Renaissance movement in the religious, social and intellectual spheres.

The traditional performing arts which flourished in pre-British India had become by now, excepting music, discredited. The *Devadasis* (temple-girls) who as a community had nurtured and sustained classical Dance and Music had fallen on days of disrepute and the movement for the abolition of the system was rampant. Only some of the Princes sustained for some time Music and Dancing through their patronage.

As far as the cinema was concerned, it took more than a decade for it to reach the smaller cities or towns in India. A reasonable spread was possible only by the mid-thirties and as communication and electricity facilities improved in the country.

In the very early days only foreign films were shown and the main interest of people in the cinema was only as a novelty.

There was no question as yet of its becoming a major vehicle for the performing arts or being influenced by them. The nature and attraction of the film medium, however, would have surely affected the *theatre* in weaning away part of its audience.

During the period 1912-1931, this tendency must have increased and was perhaps even aggravated by the entry of

Phalke into the film world, particularly his production of *Raja Harischandra* and other mythological films.

In the presentation of these themes Phalke must have surely drawn freely and liberally from the theatrical tradition of acting and direction. In the beginning he had great difficulties in finding actors and actresses to play in his films, but as time went by, the cinema benefited from artists drawn from the stage and the theatrical acting and mise-en-scene conventions. This was logical and inevitable. The themes, for the Cinema, the artistes, the techniques had all to come initially from the theatre, even as it did in the west.

It should be noted that the theatre which flourished in the metropolitan regions of the country at the beginning of the 20th century, like the Parsi theatre, was of a somewhat hybrid and artificial nature though there were exceptions to this in Maharashtra and in Bengal. It had nothing much in itself intrinsically to offer to the cinema and in the commercial competition that followed, the theatre got inevitably nudged out. The theatre was affected also because of the conversion of the theatre-halls into cinemas.

During the period 1931-1941, with the advent of the talkies the Cinema made a tremendous impact on the people. The phenomenon of pictures that could walk and talk must have seemed incredible to peasants and unsophisticated rural populations.

The extraordinary popularity of the talkies with the Indian masses is also easily explained when we consider that the talking and singing cinema along with its visual impact was an extension of the oral tradition of learning, to which they were long used. With its mythological themes and even the so-called social themes reflecting the traditional values of

the mythological tales, the cinema fused easily with the stream of knowledge of the people and provided that emotional approach which attracted the largely illiterate masses.

It is not surprising that the talkies exploited the use of songs to profusion. The musical tradition is the strongest with the Indian people. There is no ritual, or ceremonial occasion or function in India without music.

We find that in the first decade of the talkies, in all the films made by the three famous companies, Prabhat, New Theatre and Bombay Talkies, music in the films was invariably moulded in the light classical styles and because of the absence of the play-back system till around 1935, only accomplished singers played the roles which called for singing. The names of Saigal, Kanan Bala, K.C. Dey, Punkaj Mallick, Vishnu Pant Pagnis are well known. Their songs are popular even today. Similarly, in the south were famous names like T.P. Rajalakshmi, K.B. Sundarambal, Serukalathur Sama and Thyagaraja Bhagavathar.

A number of cultured, dedicated people entered the Indian cinema and enriched its heritage during this period — Shantaram, B.N. Sircar, Barua, Debaki Bose, Devika Rani, K. Subrahmanyam, B.N. Reddi, to name only a few.

Films on the lives of popular and well-known saint poets offered a rich possibility for the use of music and song, and this was done extraordinarily well in a number of films of this period — *Sant Tukaram, Dharmatma* (a film about the life of the Saint Eknath in which Bal Gandharva, a reputed singer and stage actor of Maharashtra played the lead role), *Sant Sakhu, Chandidas, Puran Bhagat* and *Vidyapathi.* The last three films were considered "revolutionary classics which altered the conception and quality of music in a film".

We may note here that the need for incidental music introduced the vogue of orchestration and, later, attempts at harmony into Indian instrumental music. The play-back system developed a special *genre* of singers, many of whom are both popular and famous.

Generally, the pundits of Music and Dance kept aloof from cinema music which they considered an inferior and cheap art form. Yet we have instances in the South of some of the famous music savants being associated with the cinema — Musiri Subramanya Iyer, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, G.N. Balasubramanyam and M.S. Subbulakshmi. Such association did not last long, nor did it produce any sensational results in influencing the cinema.

In this decade, in the South, the Tamil, Telugu and Kannada cinema bodily transferred stage plays — artistes and everything included — on to the screen, but the talent on the stage in all these areas at that time was of a high order.

The stage itself in an effort to compete with the cinema, acquiesced to the lure of introducing spectacle in a big way.

It is needless to emphasise here that along with music, the film also used classical and folk dance forms in abundance mainly to provide entertainment than in any special creative way. *Raj Nartaki* also made as *Court Dancer* in English with Sadhana Bose was an effort to interpret Indian dances on the screen to the west but it was not much of a success.

During the period 1941-1971 the broad pattern of the Indian cinema has remained the same, not withstanding some technical improvements and the advent of Satyajit Ray and a few who have followed his path.

The forties in India were a very disturbed period. The War, the 'Quit India' agitation, the communal strife that preceded Independence and followed partition, affected deeply every aspect of life.

Synchronising with Independence, in 1947-1948 three events took place in the realm of the Indian cinema — the release of Uday Shankar's *Kalpana,* Vasan's *Chandralekha* and Renoir's making of the *River* in India which Satyajit Ray watched and observed with keen and concentrated interest.

Uday Shankar withdrew from the cinema, disillusioned. Seven more years of preparation and patience were needed for Satyajit Ray to enter the Indian cinema in a quiet, inconspicuous way achieving artistic supremacy.

Vasan triumphed commercially and took the Indian cinema, the way of the box office and the successful formula.

It is a strange paradox of the Indian Cinema that indiscriminate aping of the frivolous aspects of western ways has been perhaps even greater after the country achieved Independence. This influence has been quite marked and bad. It is only recently that a healthy reaction set in against such a trend.

In the light of the mutual influence of the cinema and the performing arts, *Kalpana* is a very important and interesting work. By a curious irony of circumstances, both *Kalpana* and *Chandralekha* though very different in purpose, were made at the same studio — The Gemini Studios, Madras.

Uday Shankar, himself a reputed dancer, produced and directed the film. Directorially one may find some flaws in the film but the use of dance in it was rich, imaginative and

stimulating. Vishnudas Shirali who was later Music Director at the Government of India's Films Division, was the music director of Kalpana.

In the sequence of the Spring Festival of Dances of India, every style of Dance is effectively presented. Of particular interest is his presentation of some of the contemporary social problems — industrialisation, the superficiality of academic education etc. — choreographed in an impressionistic style but using the techniques of the traditional dances. *Kalpana* is considered a trend-setter in the field of Indian Dance. This "ballet technique" is popular and in vogue to this day in Indian dance. Shirali's music also displayed an intelligent and imaginative understanding of the needs of this new medium. I was more deeply moved when I saw this film recently, by its transparent honesty and burning sincerity.

Apropos, the importance of song and dance in the Indian tradition, it is interesting to note that Renoir used both, in the Indian style in his film *The River.*

Chandralekha released in 1948, set the pattern for the commercial box office film.

An escapist, synthetic folk tale, it was wrapped up in a lot of spectacle, hair raising thrilling adventures of the rescue of the heroine in distress, swordfights on staircases, a castle surrounded by moats and full of labyrinths and dungeons, a whole big circus, spectacular dances and what not. It ran for four long hours and more; it was released simultaneously in a hundred cinema houses in South India, with all the publicity blurbs, selectively culled from Hollywood.

The colossal dimensioned drum dance which came as a finale to the film was a pot-pourri of dance styles, costumes and

imitation western background music. *Chandralekha* was a block buster and it succeeded tremendously. Whatever I may be writing now in retrospect, I must confess I enjoyed it when I saw it for the first time. Somehow, it successfully lulled all the critical activities of the mind. It was like dope and it worked magnificently on the film going masses. It was a tremendous financial success which prompted Vasan to take the next step of translating it into Hindi, and exploit the all-India market. He succeeded eminently in this effort also. The great formula had been born and the mushrooming of imitators has not stopped till today.

A.V. Meiyappan made his film *Ladki* introducing the adolescent and very pretty Vyjayanthimala in it. In her the new type of glamorous star was born, who would eventually hold in a stranglehold the very producers who had created them. The stars flourished and prospered even as the producers competed among themselves for booking these stars. The formula film catered to the lowest common denominator in taste in an effort to attract the maximum number of spectators. Its aim was to titillate instead of stimulate, and the result was the hybridisation of the music and dance elements introduced in such films. At one stage All India Radio banned film music but later relaxed the ban. It cannot be denied that film music, particularly the songs has come to stay as a popular form of music. A good deal of it however, is cheap, vulgar and imbecile. This refers as much to the regional commercial cinema which is only an imitation, if not a plagiarism, of the successful commercial films be they in Hindi or some other language. In three decades thousands of such films have been churned out and it is better to leave the whole lot of them to remain anonymous in this article.

Dance has also suffered badly. I should like to quote in this context, the views of a well-known musicologist and

research scholar on Dance, Prof. R. Satyanarayana:

"Some movies have to use one or more dance sequences, usually woven with considerable difficulty into the main theme. This is the 'entertainment' or 'box office' part of the show. The script is usually tepid or the theme is weak in such pictures and one does not grudge the poor people concerned a devious device of attracting the elusive lucre. But it makes me unhappy that the sublime art of dance has to flaunt in tinsel in questionable taste before the indiscriminate gallery."

"The dance director in such a film if there be such a person at all, seems to labour under the illusion that the dancer's costume should be designed only to reveal, rather than suggest her 'vital' statistics. The dancer is not always of the best in her profession. The director feels bound to make up for what she lacks in the art with corporal — I almost said pornographic — exhibitionism. This dancer has the advantage of being a shadow and of ignoring the pain and aversion that the refined Rasika feels. If Bharata, Nandikeswara of Kohala were interred, they would have certainly turned in their graves at the goings on of some of their descendants."

In fact right now Indian censorship is busy fighting this trend of increasingly vulgar and erotic cabaret dance sequences in films. Lest all this may be considered an exaggerated or unduly prejudiced view, I quote here a few excerpts from the Film Enquiry Committee report 1951. The Committee consisted of eminent persons, among them Shantaram and B.N. Sircar. The Committee's findings were based on replies to questionnaires from a large cross section of the people in the Industry and the public and also a number of interviews with eminent people. "Quality of films technical and artistic — ..... the industry has not been able to do much to arrest its descent down hill ..... where intellect and art are involved,

it exhibits general poverty ..... The themes are stereotyped; the triangle of love seems eternal; the plots are monotonously uniform in pattern. There is scant realisation of the danger of too much repetition of a box office hit ..... Standard of Historicals and Mythologicals — The treatment displays a lack of perspective and familiarity with history and susceptibilities ..... Mythology becomes a caricature of religion ..... Comedies are just parodies. Impact of 'Star' craze — Stars in a role to which either on account of age or on account of physical proportions, they can do scant justice, indifferent acting, unsuited parts, artificiality and lack of naturalness and realism are some of the defects which are writ large on Indian films of today". Inappropriate music, and indiscriminate dance sequences and poor taste in both were also commented upon by the Committee.

So much for the formula films. Naturally they couldn't have played a major and constructive role in the dissemination of the performing arts.

Fortunately not all films produced are in this category. There are luckily some oases in the desert of the Indian formula film. It is only possible to mention some of the titles: *Tansen, Pukar,* Shantaram's *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje*, Do Ankhen Bara Hath, Dharti ke Lal*** and *Munna, Do Bhiga Zamin* and other films of Bimal Roy, the early films of Hrishikesh Mukherjee, a couple of films of Raj Kapoor, all the films of Satyajit Ray, Ritwick Ghatak and Mrinal Sen and the very recent films of Mani Kaul, Basu Bhattacharya and some others. This is surely not an exhaustive list.

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* The dances in this film were given by the famous Kathak dancer, Gopi Krishna.

** **Dharti ke Lal** was a play of the progressive theatre group — The Indian People's Theatre Association.

Satyajit Ray is without doubt, one of the great figures of world cinema. Such is his stature and talent. The wonderful use of incidental music in all his films, and his use of music in *Jalsaghar*, only prove what a creative artist with a thorough knowledge and appreciation of music can achieve by a subtle and effective application of it to the film medium. The juxtaposition of Ravi Shankar's sitar music to the insect dance in the pond in *Pather Panchali;* the *leit motif* tune of *Charulata*, suddenly come to mind. It is only artists like this who could while using the performing arts for the cinema also influence them by their creative way of using them. Only thus can we develop a new genre of film music and film dance. When we speak of traditional performing arts and this process of cross fertilisation with other arts and media, we should remember that stagnation and moribundity should not be mistaken for tradition. Good tradition always grows and evolves like the Banyan tree. Tradition never represents a point of time, it represents a period of time.

Regarding the influence of the cinema on music and dance, it should be noted that it has swept away the notion of disrespectability of these professions. On the contrary the popularity of play-back singers and dancer-stars have led to persons from all classes of society training and aspiring to such positions.

I have only spoken of song and dance so far. A word about the theatre. The professional theatre has had a chequered life in India. In the last few decades the theatre movement has attracted many amateurs and semi-professionals. The amateurs are deeply interested in the film medium and slowly a process of cross fertilisation between the two media has started. On the technical side the cinema is having an influence on the theatre, in the techniques of make-up, lighting, decor and costuming, and with the microphone now available, in

the acting technique too. I feel that the theatre should guard itself against an exaggeration of such tendencies. It is said that even the folk theatres in the rural areas are influenced by the cinema in these respects. The dangers of this influence can be imagined since the bulk of Indian cinema is yet of the formula type which has nothing but superficial glamour and artificiality to offer.

The production of short films and documentaries is almost a monopoly of the Government of India Films Division and the Information departments of some of the State Governments.

The Films Division has made a number of interesting films on music and the dance. There are also a number of films about famous musicians and dancers. They made a feature length film *Dharti ki Jhankar* on the various folk dances of India using well-known groups and troupes. The film was produced by V. Shantaram and directed by A. Bhaskar Rao. Films on *Bharata Natyam* and *Kathakali* have been made with leading exponents as performers.

Such is in brief the Indian film scene and its relation to the performing arts.

The cinema is a means for mass exhibition on a global scale. It has fantastic technical advantages to record faithfully, truthfully and even dramatically the various events and processes in life. Its impact is audio-visual. It can be thus used to tremendous advantage, to record, recreate, analyse, preserve and disseminate the various performing arts. The only disadvantage is that it is an expensive medium. Besides, in a developing country like India there are problems of communication, of power supply and the multiplicity of languages.

As for the mass media using the performing arts as sources for original creation, the limits and limitations are only those of the ability of the artist handling them. The cinema is, after all, a medium first and foremost. There is tremendous scope in India for its use, for healthy entertainment, honest information and wholesome instruction.

Despite all that has been said, let us remember that India has today only about 7500 cinemas for a population of over 550 millions. This means that there are still vast areas and a sizeable number of people untouched and perhaps uninfluenced by the cinema. Large sections of the population of the country are strangers to the cinema. Incredible, but true. This should humble anyone who tries to generalise or make sweeping statements on the subject of the influence of the cinema in India. In the absence of proper evaluation in a scientific and systematic way, all the conclusions and observations, wherever they come from, must be treated as basically *a priori.*

Television is only just making a beginning in India. Of course it has a tremendous potential as a medium of mass communication. It has a virgin field ahead. How it will affect, for good or bad, the traditional performing arts or even the Indian way of life remains to be seen. This will no doubt depend on how it will be used, the direction given to it and, naturally, on the sense and taste of the policy makers, the administrators and the technicians in charge of the medium.

Printed in Iran, by the Offset Pres Inc., Tehran.