



REVIEW OF
**THE MUSICIAN AND HIS ART: ESSAYS
ON HINDUSTĀNĪ MUSIC**
BY DEEPAK S. RAJA WITH A FOREWORD
BY DANIEL NEUMAN. NEW DELHI:
D.K. PRINT WORLD
[ISBN 10: 8124609551/ISBN 13: 9788124609552].

Gisa Jähnichen

Shanghai Conservatory of Music, contact: gisajaehnichen@web.de

Abstract

This is the Review of “The Musician and His Art: Essays on Hindustānī Music by Deepak S. Raja with a Foreword by Daniel Neuman, New Delhi: D.K. Print World.” This review was initiated through a request made by the author, which I was glad to accept.

Keywords

Hindustānī music, aesthetics, audiences, music philosophy, decolonizing academia

Deepak Raja’s book is a very brave try to overcome the recent demands of writing in the scheme of Euro-American thesis rigorism. The world of knowledge, as it seems, might feel comforted through a widely admitted subjectivity, the rare referencing¹, the unstructured implants of philosophical needles throughout the various chapters, and the freshness of personal opinions about any subject that crosses the way of Deepak Raja’s ideas.

Yet, a missing scheme, as one can easily find out, is not limited to the writing style. It is also often absent in the entire development of thoughts about the topic.

The different chapters are lectures and speeches that touch Hindustānī music in a rather specified way. Each of them is dedicated to a part of the whole, and, at the same time, wants to embrace the complete background. This lecture-approach can undoubtedly lead to creative inconsequentiality with some points to ponder upon but no definite ambition. Thinking to the varying audiences of those lectures, a visible structure might have helped draw attention and inspire holistic views. In some cases, an entire paragraph consists of dense ideas on music in general, thus reaching far beyond the meaning of Hindustānī music. I deny calling them simply ‘essays’. Those imparted philosophical outbreaks deserve an analytical sense and re-reading from different perspectives.

One of these contributions (lecture 7, page 66-77) is dealing with philosophy of music when pondering upon the meaning of “abstraction”. It is rather a provocation of general thoughts on any type of music. The author asks among others “How much can you dilute the contemplative genres and movements before you are obliged to call it entertainment?” (page 71). This question

¹ For example, the author mentioned a number of textbooks circulating in academic institutions without giving any reference (page 104). This seems to be to avoid pinpointing single issues and rather to give space for a general discussion.

tells a lot about the author who obviously sees entertainment as something “diluted”, less artful, generally something less. Also, the author might have switched off his generally sharp observation of historical differences when mentioning “contemplative genres” as if musical expressions can be divided into general genres, which possibly were all the time entertaining to some audiences². In another lecture, very dense of information, he takes his time to explore “The Hindustānī music tradition is so designed that, knowingly or unknowingly, every significant musician is a product of his generation, speaks on behalf of his generation and addresses primarily his own generation of listeners” (page 152). This could probably apply to any type of music in the world, regardless of what academic writing offers so far. The main question to discuss will be whether this book on Hindustānī music is yet another book on the aesthetics of performing arts in general or is it indeed dedicated to specific problems of Hindustānī music. In order to support an extended discussion, the space and time limitations of terms used are kept open and widely untouched by the author. This situation invites critical thinking and does not follow an authoritative approach.

Deepak Raja’s 6th lecture on Amplification, Recordings, and Hindustānī Music (page 47-65) given as the Bhatkhande Memorial Lecture, Dadar-Matunga Cultural Centre, Mumbai, 22 October 2016, is a fine example of the mixture of personal opinions, detailed knowledge of social facts, and the unawareness or purposeful avoidance of already existing references in this regard such as the details provided by Gronow (1981), Gronow and Saunio (1998), or by Kinnear (1994).

Another very interesting lecture is scrutinizing the role of music criticism. The main topic seems quite far away from here and plays only a role as an example the author is familiar with. Interestingly, the outcome is somewhat contradictory with regard to exactly what the author is doing through this book: Throwing a critical light on the development of Hindustānī music and the understanding among musicians and audiences. The last three paragraphs of this lecture are written with a warning undertone such as “Critical output emerging in an environment dominated by Western scholarship may win academic laurels and acquire an international following amongst Hindustānī music enthusiasts. If Indian scholarship cannot establish a meaningful dialogue with the performing tradition, both the traditions will soon be heading for sterility”. Reviewing this short paragraph reveals many points of static categories, that are questioned in other places of the book. ‘Western’ and ‘scholarship’ alone are two terms that need not only a better embedding and differentiation, but also a better understanding as a historical and demographic process. The same may apply to terms such as ‘tradition’ and ‘international’. Again, the author opens up to a wide field of discussion that hopefully follow.

All his lectures on specific details in Hindustānī music add to the welcoming discussions and deliver an excellent summary into the most current views on various issues within its world at the beginning of the 21st century.

Finally, I recommend the book all those people who want to look through the gaze of Hindustānī music on the world of sound as art, as a product within a national or the twisted world market, or as something that transforms aesthetic symbols into subjective communication.

The author understood to keep his statements clear enough, for example through adopting the rule of three in a row, and straight forward in order to avoid being misinterpreted. The book is also recommended to those readers who may have another view on the same issues. I think that a continuous discussion is entirely in line with the goal of the author’s efforts.

² Stimulatingly described by Meddegoda and Dias (2012).

REFERENCES

- Gronow, Pekka and Ilpo Saunio. 1998. *International History of the Recording Industry*. London: Continuum.
- Kinnear, Michael. 1994. *The Gramophone Industry's First Indian Recordings 1899-1908*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
- Gronow, Pekka. 1981. The Recording Industry Comes to the Orient. *Ethnomusicology*, 25 (2): 251-284.
- Meddegoda, Chinthaka and Ruwin Dias. 2012. Interaction of Musicians and Audience during Performances of Hindustānī Classical Music. *Music and Dance in Environment*. UPM Book Series on Music Research, vol. 5. Edited by Gisa Jähnichen and Chinthaka Meddegoda. Serdang: UPM Press, 83–94.