

Dr. Gurnam Singh

Better known for promulgation and performance of Gurmat Sangeet, Dr. Gurnam Singh's *Punjabi Lok Sangeet Virasat* (Heritage of Punjabi Folk Music), published by Punjabi University Patiala, is not just another book. It is a massive work done at a very crucial time with affection and involvement. Being very diminutive of music-writers, we don't have many standard publications on Punjabi musicology. The practitioners have been doing their job for centuries on end but nobody thought of recording their activity in a proper perspective. The state level art bodies have neither resources nor vision to strike in this direction, while the national bodies are more bothered to locate the similarities in various traditions to prove the so-called unity in Indian diversity.

The present volume is a refreshingly unique outcome of tough, unswerving and premeditated labour of 10 years, coupled with the sincerity and cooperation of so many scholars and artists. It's based upon workshops, live formal and informal performances, and, interactions of cultural, literary and scholars of music with the artists of so many fading traditions. The publication in 2 volumes of a mammoth size may go a long way in serving cause of music, dance, literature and theatre of Punjab. Till date we were at ease with the compilations of folk songs of various regions and categories, but ever since the melodies of such folk are becoming less integral part of our collective conscious, there was a worrying need of a systematic record of fading arts of traditional folk singing. And what a fabulous manner it has been achieved!

Starting with role of Punjab played to enrich North Indian tradition of music with its inventive contributions in form of Gurmat Sangeet and Sufi Sangeet, Gurnam Singh deals extensively with folklore of Kavishri, Dhadhi-singing, Puadhi Akharha, Gugga Gayaki, Toomba-Tara, King and Toombi-singing in the first volume. 2nd volume transacts with the well-off repertoire of female Punjabi folk songs, traditions of singing along with folk dances, singing with Male form of Giddha, and, music of male dancers accompanying Been-Bajas (The Bagpipers). He also discusses, in detail, all the string instruments, including Saarangi & Algoze, and the percussion instruments like Dhol,

Nagaaraa, Khanjri, Dafli, Gharha, Bughdhoo etc. The closing chapter enlists names and forms of more than 350 resource artists who were instrumental to construct this material.

In each of the above forms, author divides his material in three major parts. After establishing the form that includes its musical, literary and presentation related characteristics, author talks about the training and processes, if any, involved in the singing. He also introduces his reader with some of popular texts of the form, published or otherwise, and then the notation of the song along with names of singers.

Notation of classical singing may be an easier proposition as the characteristics of the Rgas are fixed, but to construct the folk singing in black and white is real historical work. In addition to the unique aspects of this form that is sung without any instrument (for melody or for rhythm), the chapter on Kavishri also gives various historical, folk and mythological texts. They include stories of Kaulan, Ookhan Anirudh, Jaani Chor, Roop Basant etc.

This book may, in addition to its technical worth, prove to be a short course in appreciation of folk music of Punjab. A concentrated reading can introduce us with some of the finer nuances and differences between the two or more forms. One can know that Gugga Gayaki creates more solemn impact (than Dhadhis) with its different type of Saarangi and usage of Douru in place of Dhads.

But one also starts expecting more as it becomes difficult for an ordinary reader, to know in clear terms, differences between the singing along with King, Toomba and Toombi that have a common process of construction but are at variance in tone and timbre. We hope Dr. Gurnam Singh shall take care of such details before the next edition goes to press. He should also consider, seriously, omitting the superfluous usage of adjectives and allegory. They have become barriers rather than serving as carriers of his ideas.