

Peter Manuel: *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*. xix, 302 pp. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

The title of this book is modest almost to the extent of being misleading. Peter Manuel's fine account of the development of the cassette industry in India actually goes far beyond the consideration of musicological and technological issues, and adds very considerably to our understanding of contemporary culture and of social issues in India, not to mention the specific contemporary expression of 'communalism' and religious chauvinism.

Manuel shows that the spread of cassette technology in the 1980s not only made recorded sound available to a much wider market than had been economically possible before, but also opened up the recording business to a completely new range of musicians, impresarios, and entrepreneurs. In pre-cassette days when the vinyl disc was effectively the only medium for the commercial distribution of sound recordings, a virtual monopoly of music reproduction was held by the Gramophone Company of India and its 'His Master's Voice' label; but Manuel argues that 'HMV has been in a state of clear decline since the early 1970s, such that its logo of a terrier listening to an antique gramophone strikes many consumers as more pathetic than prestigious' (p. 66). Despite its 'phlegmatic habits acquired through decades of monopoly', HMV was able to impose a conformity of 'safe', commercially-proven styles on the output of recorded music. This restriction was to be removed by the development of new recording technologies, for the advent of cassettes meant that recordings could be made, copied and distributed from local centres working on tiny budgets, leading to the re-assertion of India's natural diversity of musical forms and genres.

Peter Manuel's discussion of this hugely significant development is based on a clearly articulated history of the economics of the sound recording industry both in India and beyond; and it derives its theoretical framework from the analytical perspectives of communications theory. A project of this kind calls on a wide diversity of expertise — a demand which Manuel fulfils admirably, even when venturing furthest from the home base in musicology that he demonstrated in his earlier book, the authoritative *Thumrī in historical and stylistic perspectives* (Delhi 1989). After chalking out the economic history of the cassette revolution, Manuel considers the cultural effects of this new medium, looking inter alia at film music, the popular 'semi-classical' genre of the *ghazal*, the devotional *bhajan* and its commercialization, and the influence of modern musical genres on traditional folk music. A separate chapter with far-reaching implications for the transmission of popular culture looks at the phenomenon of 'parody' — a term whose meaning has undergone a sea-change in the Indian context where it 'has no pejorative or satirical connotations, but merely denotes the setting of a new text to a borrowed tune' (p. 131).

Set within the sweep of this wide-ranging history of popular musical culture is a chapter entitled '*Rasiya*: a case study in commercialisation'. Manuel's treatment of this individual genre of folk music from the Braj region exemplifies the innovative but rigorous approach so admirably typical of the book as a whole. No serious analysis of the *rasiyā* genre ever having been attempted before in English, Manuel has first to identify and analyse it in terms of its musical and literary (or more modestly, 'textual') content, before extending his research into the artistic and commercial state of *rasiyā* in the 1990s. The often bawdy and lewd *rasiyā* lyrics have much in common with the more risqué of the *ṭhumrī* songs, as is clear from comparison with texts in Manuel's earlier book; (and in describing the convention wherein an apparently vulgar context is introduced, only to be denied by an innocent resolution — "'It's rammed inside me, it hurts, take it out"... "A thorn has come into my foot, please take it out"' (p. 203) — a further parallel could incidentally have been shown with the so-called *mukrī* or 'denial' genre of popular verse, whose antiquity is suggested by attributions to the prodigiously busy polymath Amir Khusrau). Manuel's work on *rasiyā*, a genre which sits in sometimes uncomfortable juxtaposition to the piety of Braj Vaiṣṇava lyrics, adds considerably to the small corpus of published research on folk genres of this kind; one hopes that his knowledge of Braj culture in particular will lead him further in this same direction — preferably citing full original texts (rather than simply first lines, as given here) in the writing-up of his research.

The use of cassettes to reflect particular cultural and religious positions, and in various levels of sociopolitical propaganda often dedicated to the sowing of dissent and 'communal' hatred, shows that developments in the electronic media have a darker side also. The penultimate chapter of the book gives eloquent evidence, if such were needed, of the perilous state of inter-communal relations in post-1992 India, adding yet another dimension of interest to this excellent book.

A future edition would benefit from a few amendments: a more comprehensive (and accurate) index; restoration of a more orthodox spelling to the name of tabla maestro 'Akka' Rakha (p. 70); and some attention to spelling conventions in the glossary (allegedly based on 'the system of Platts', which however would not explain such orthographies as '*dhrūpad*' '*sāntūr*', or '*bhaktī*'). Finally, it needs to be noted that if the *Ayodhyākāṇḍ* of the *Rāmāyaṇ* really were the chapter in which 'Ram returns triumphantly to his home' (p. 254) then both sides in the epic war would have been saved much trouble; and although Manuel maintains that he has 'deliberately attempted to avoid making subjective value judgements about the quality of the music itself' (p. 58), a series of less-than-flattering comments about playback singer Lata Mangeshkar suggests that he has here written off more than he can eschew.

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