Tărle Bărle songs are sung by Tărle tribe. They sing and dance to seek blessings of mother earth in these hilly regions with drums and flute while they repeat words ‘tărle bărle’ after each verse.

Gonḍara Kunità is an ancient form of music. Only drums are played with no vocal music.

Gumate - the earthen pot kind of drum covered with animal skin is played by men. After each cyclic rhythm they change beat by playing 3 times, like a muktaya in classical music.

Kangīlu Kunīta - This Kangīlu tribe wear skirts made of coconut leaves and flowers to offer worship to their regional god. They sing and dance in circular formations.

As per the regions the folk music can be studied as North (Uttara Karnataka), South Karnataka or daksina, Central Karnataka & Coastal area.

North comprises of B'dar, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Ballari, Belgaum, Bagalkot. The folk traditions are GīGī Pada, lāvaṇi, Caudike, Tatva Pada, Mallare Lingaṇa hādu, Kōlīṭa hādu, Suggi hādu.

South or Daksīna Kannāṭa comprises of Udupi and other places. Folk forms are Kangīlu, karaga, Kōlīṭa, Bhutta Kōla and other forms.

Central or madhya Kannāṭa comprise of the regions of Tumkur, Śīmogga, Dāvāṇagere, Citradurga, Cikkaṇagūṭr, Hassan. Folk forms are Bhaṇaṇe Mēla, Kinnara mēla, Vīra gāse, Doḷjukunīṭa, kaṇī vādane.

Coastal area comprise of the regions of Uttara / north canara, Honnīṭvāra. Folk forms/ tribal forms are siddhi, gondali, hālakki okkaligaru, Suggi, Nillagarra pada.

The experience of exploring the folk traditions of our land makes one proud of being a part of such a rich cultural heritage. The folk Musicians & dancers of our country continue to perform, for they simply have to. To them, art is a part of their daily life. They do it for the love of it.

References: Based on Kannāṭa Jānapada Kālegāla Kōla - Compiled by H. G. Bōrlingayya, Kannada University, Hampi. Inputs given by Dr. Sarvamangala, Director Archives Karnataka Jānapada Parisat and Deśī Magazine. Audio- Visual aids by Kannāṭa Jānapada Parisat.

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Book Review

Isai Marabu
(PANCHAMARABU Dr. S.A.K. Durga)

Over the last century much attention has been given to transliteration and translation of early works on music in Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil. One such effort is the work on the Isai Marabu of Pancha Marabu by Arivanar. This publication has been brought out by the Center for Ethnomusicology and co-authored by Dr. S.A.K. Durga, well known ethnomusicologist and researcher along with Dr. Alamelu Ramakrishnan, who has written several text books for school students.

Numerous treatises have been written on the grammar and practice of music. Adiyarkku nallar who wrote a commentary on the Silappadikaram cites five important works on music and one among them is the Pancha Marabu, that is an extensive work on music and dance. As the work deals with the traditions of ‘isai, vācīa, tāḷam, kūṭṭu and abhinayam’, it is called Pancha (five) Marabu (traditions). Both the vācīa marabu and tāḷa marabu deal with aspects of rhythm, and kūṭṭu and abhinayam marabu deal with nṛta and abhinayam aspects of dance. The first section, Isai Marabu, is a detailed account of the grammar of music. As a musician and researcher, Dr. Durga has aptly chosen to bring out their first publication on just the Isai Marabu alone.

The source for this work is a publication in 1973 by Shakti Ara nilayam, Kovai in memory of Sri N. Mahalingam of Pollachi. The book wrongly mentions the publication to be from Pollachi in the front cover.

The introduction to the book speaks of the growth of Tamil as a language under the Pandya kings. The Panchamarabu is a work that is believed to be in the last Sangam period from B.C. 325 to A.D 350 as there is reference to the Pandya ruler Māran, ‘Mannan tirumāran’ as mentioned in the Yāṭh Marabu. Some scholars date this work to the middle Sangam period as well. The introduction also carries a note on the type of metre called Veppa used extensively in this work.

Isai Marabu has 5 sections ‘Yāṭh Marabu, Vāṇgiya Marabu, Kāṇṭha Marabu, Niratta Marabu (qualities of sound) and Vagairozhibu Marabu (types of instruments, pans, time, etc.) This book titled Isai Marabu focuses only on these five aspects.

The book has two sections. In the first section, each verse is very methodically transliterated into English. The transliteration is very useful for those who cannot read Tamil or for those who do not understand the archaic tamil used in the original work. This is followed by a free translation of the Tamil verse into English along with some comments.

The second section has additional commentaries of the editors on the verses that have been translated.

References: Based on Karnataka Janapada Kālegāla Kōla - Compiled by H. G. Bōrlingayya, Kannada University, Hampi. Inputs given by Dr. Sarvamangala, Director Archives Karnataka Jānapada Parisat and Deśī Magazine. Audio- Visual aids by Kannāṭa Jānapada Parisat.
Dr. Durga has drawn a comparison with the verses in the Pancha Marabu mentioned in the commentary of Adiyarkunallar. 36 verses from Pancha Marabu appear in the commentary on Silappadikaram. The chapter on Yazh Marabu describes the ancient stringed instrument. Specific yazhs were assigned to the five different types of landscapes each associated with different flora, fauna and physical topography. Dr. Durga traces the etymology of yazh and mentions that it is derived from 'ya' meaning 'to tie or fasten'. Hunters tied strings tightly to their bows to release arrows with precision. Strings in a yazh render precise notes. The concept of Vaṭṭapāḷai and modal shift of tonic is explained. The origin of the seven notes is also explained.

The chapter on ‘Vangiya Marabu’ describes techniques of playing the vangiya or flute. It also gives details about the method of making and seasoning the wood for the flute, the length, circumference, the size of holes, etc. blowing techniques and the role of the tongue in sound production.

The Kantha Marabu speaks about the nuances of vocal music and voice production. There is also a description of the role of the five elements, the nāḍis and life forces prāṇa, apāṇa etc in voice production. The explanation about, prāṇa, vyāṇa, apāṇa etc from Piṅgaḷa Nigaṇḍu (a kind of thesaurus of words written about the 10th century A.D.) has been accessed online as mentioned in the book.

Niratta Marabu is also referred to as tirutta marabu. This section deals with musical sounds, voice protection, impurities of sound, the origin of sound from the eight sthānas rising from the muladhāra and methods of singing notes- such as a glide, swift movement and a weave.

Those capable of performance are: one born in a respectable family and one who has constantly practised music since childhood, one who has a naturally sweet and melodious voice, one without worries and one who is free from disease!!

To improve the voice, herbs to be taken are mentioned. They are ‘tippili, honey, dried ginger, black pepper, cow’s milk and some medicinal herbs with butter.

In the section on Vagai ozhibu Marabu, sounds emanating from strings, from air through openings/ holes, the voice, skin and metal are mentioned.

The division of a day into eight units, the Deity that governs each unit and the pans suitable for each time are mentioned.

Musicians are advised to avoid ‘nagai pugai’- loud laughter and taking in of smoke. This is explained as the use of narcotics in the book as smoking is only about 300 years old.

The second part of the book has the commentaries of the editors and is very interesting and informative. The concept of the organs of voice production as eight sthānas, are similar to those mentioned in the science of phonetics. Dr. Durga draws a parallel to the voice registers mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra. Terms such as ‘aripparai or mupparai’ that are no longer in vogue have been explained. It consists of a thin chain worn by children to which was attached coins and talisman- like objects.

It is interesting to know that concepts such as modal shift, gamakas, voice production and gayaka guṇa doṣas appear so early in the history of our music. The study of music is done in a scientific manner including the organs of voice production and origin of sound. This is a very valuable book both for students of music and for those interested in Tamil literature. The translation and transliteration that has been painstakingly done by Dr. Durga and Dr. Alamelu has made the book accessible to a much wider readership. I am sure they plan to follow it up with a few more books on the other four ‘Marabu’ mentioned in the original work.

Dr. Sumathi Krishnan