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Embryology, Asceticism and Music: *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* and *Saṅgītaratnākara**

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One of the well-known descriptions of embryology and anatomy contained in non-medical texts is that found in the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (= *YS*), in its section on the *āśrama* of the *sannyāsin* (*YS* 3,70-107). That the few verses following the description of embryology and anatomy have yogic contents (*YS* 3,108-111) is a known fact. Considering that some scholars¹ postulate that medical science in South Asia was once developed in the ascetic milieu, it comes as no surprise that the verses on yoga follow the ones on embryology and anatomy.²

So far, a fact to which little attention has been paid is that the verses following those mentioned above treat the topic of music (*YS* 3,112-116). Both secular vocal and instrumental music are mentioned as substitutes for the recitation of sacramental songs, i.e. *sāmans* (*YS* 3,112). The genres of songs mentioned as secular vocal music in these verses³ coincide with those mentioned in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The knowledge of playing the stringed instrument called *vīṇā*, i.e. the knowledge of the microtones (*śruti*), musical scales (*jāti*) and rhythms (*tāla*), is even considered to be a way to liberation (*mokṣa*) (*YS* 3,115).

These three groups of verses, on embryologico-anatomical science, yoga and

* This is a brief overview on a discussion presented in deeper detail in my dissertation, under preparation, on the *Pinḍotpattiprakaraṇa* of Śārṅgadeva's *Saṅgītaratnākara*.

¹ E.g. ZYSK 1990.

² The term 'embryologico-anatomical science' has been used here to mean the matter of embryology and anatomy treated in the Śārīrasthānas of the medical texts, and in corresponding parts of nonmedical texts.

³ *YS* 3,113f., which obviously contain some misreadings. Compare with the names of the songs – *aparāntaka*, *ullopyaka*, *madraka*, *prakarī*, *oveṇaka*, *rovindaka* and *uttara* – mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (32,200cd-201ab). These are classes of *dhruvā* songs (cf. WIERSMA-TE NIJ-ENHUIS 1970: 367). *Ṛc*, *pāṇikā* and *gāthā* are also mentioned as classes of *dhruvā* songs in *Nāṭyaśāstra* 32,1-2ab.

music, seem to have been composed in different periods and inserted one after the other into the original frame of the text.⁴ The association of secular music with asceticism or embryologico-anatomical science seems peculiar.

It is not, however, that there are no other texts dealing with the topics secular music, yoga and embryologico-anatomical science; an example is Śārṅgadeva's *Saṅgītaratnākara* (= *SR*), one of the most basic musicological treatises. The 'Generation of the Embryo' (*Pīṇdotpatti*), which is the second section (*prakaraṇa*) of the first chapter (*adhyāya*), first of all discusses the embryologico-anatomical science, then Haṭhayoga.⁵ Finally, it recommends the practice of secular music as a substitute for the *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* meditation; this is similar in its reasoning to that of the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (*SR* 1,2,164-168).

The author Śārṅgadeva might have had the before-mentioned passages of the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* in mind, utilising them as his model. This theory is supported by the following two facts: The first fact is that his predecessor Abhinavagupta⁶ quotes *YS* 3,116 in his commentary (*Abhinavabhāratī*) on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (on 28,11). The other is that the commentary of Siṃhabhūpāla on *SR* 1,3,2 quotes *YS* 3,115. This is evidence of a tradition in which the *YS* passage played a part. It is, therefore, very probable that the author of *SR*, too, was aware of the statement of *YS*.

As to why anatomy and music are associated, we can think of the very old image of the body-*vīṇā*, which can be traced back to *Aitareyāranyaka* 3,25,⁷

⁴ Cf. KANE 1990: 447.

⁵ Both have parallel texts. The embryologico-anatomical part (*SR* 1,2,18-119) finds its parallel in the *Śivagītā*, *adhyāyas* 8 and 9. The Haṭhayogic part (*SR* 1,2,145cd-163ab) finds its parallel in the old yoga text *Yogayājñavalkya* (*adhyāya* 4). Unfortunately, I could not find a parallel for the part on cakras (*SR* 1,2,120-145ab), though it is most probable that such a parallel exists. The information on the two parallel texts is given respectively in COMBA 1981 and GEENENS 2000. Remarkably, the *Saṅgītaratnākara* seems to preserve an even more original and complete version of the text than the two parallel texts. The results of further research will be given in my dissertation which is in preparation.

⁶ Śārṅgadeva includes Abhinavagupta among his predecessors (*SR* 1,1,19).

⁷ Cf. LATH 1978: 201.

where the structure of the human body is compared to that of the *vīṇā*. This image seems to have acquired a durable tradition in later periods, in the milieu of music, yoga and tantra.⁸

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⁸ An intimation of this image is given in SR 1,3,8f. Abhinavagupta mentions it (on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 28,13-15), immediately after he quotes the verse from YS. For the information on the image of the body-*vīṇā* mentioned in the musicological texts, cf. LATH 1978: 197-206. Besides, this image is also found in the *Dhyānabindūpaniṣad* (102), the *Caryāpadas* (no. 17, quoted in DAS GUPTA 1976: 98) and Kabīr's poetry. Intriguingly, Arabic music, too, hands down a similar image.