

Texts, Tunes and Tones: An Indian Perspective

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It is essential to put down connotations of some terms in the title noting in the process, the terminological equivalents.

Texts

Texts are a purposeful putting together of linguistic units with a view to narrate a story, state an idea or express an emotion. Further, texts are very often meant to be elaborated through linguistic or non-linguistic resources. When elaborated through language, texts become literature; those elaborated through abhinaya (histrionic expression) they turn into plays; and those designed to be developed through music or dance are described as compositions. Texts would be known in India as samhita. It must be noted that neither of the terms indicate an etymological insistence on the element of 'writing' or the 'written'. In fact etymology of the word samhita brings into relief factors of 'skill' and 'bringing together'. Texts also result from purposeful and regulated arrangements of units of meaningless sound-syllables, whether voiced or drummed, a fact which may run contrary to the usual supposition and hence needs to be noted.

Tunes

Tunes are melodic patterns - minor compositions - which may or may not be superimposed on texts. In some cases tunes act as tonal moulds in which texts are fitted. The majority of tunes are easily abstractable and hence are not confined to particular texts. All texts which fulfill certain formal conditions could use the same tune provided tonal symbolism and other factors do not intervene. Considered as musical ideas tunes do not allow or encourage musical elaboration or development. Tunes are complete in themselves though in a minor way. Such tunes are variously called chal, chalan, tarz

and the like. A related meaning of *chal* is, for instance, a division of verse-text indicative of a metrical and melodic change within sections of a longer poem.

Yet another connotation of the term 'tune' suggests that tunes are melodic patterns of loose construction inviting elaboration. Such tunes are called 'dhun'-s. They have more potential than musical phrases but remain below the level of a composition.

Tone

Tone is a general and an enveloping intellectual-emotional charge produced by or associated with a text. The nearest equivalent seems to be the term *bhav*. This musico-aesthetic connotation obviously enjoys a wider connotation than the import of the term in linguistics. Conceptual battles have been fought to determine the nature of relationship existing between tone and the two other terms. It has been argued on one side that tone is a resultant of the combined/separate operations of tune and texts. On the other hand a casual statement on the relationship is rejected to aver that performance of text-tune and the rise of the related affective state ('tone') are to be treated as simultaneous. The coming together of the three concepts creates a situation in which the famed *rasa*-theory and the controversies raging around it become relevant. From the triad tone opens the most direct of the channels to *rasa*.

On this background the Indian perspective demands an examination of five musical categories which offer different kinds of relationships of the triad. Admittedly each category can be (and also needs to be) discussed separately. However a general perspective would facilitate gaining special insights through specific studies. With this hope a strategy of focusing on one element of the triad each time and examining the maximum number of categories in relation to it is adopted.

I: Texts

Texts in Art Music

For the present discussion "art music" denotes musics described as classical and semi-classical of both North and South India. In art music texts are largely language oriented. Contrary to the sweeping generalization of-ten heard, a number of traditional compositions (or *bandish*-s as they are known) possess high literary value.

Art music compositions are characterized by a thematic similarity, irrespective of the musical genre. Thus dhrupad-dhamar, khayal, khayalnuma, ashtapadi, tarana, ras, ragasagar and the like deal with a family of themes common to all. The fact has a clear bearing on the tone as well as the tune of the text. For instance the raga-s and tala-s selected for a bandish depend on the text offered. In fact the raga-rasa sanketa (convention about the raga-rasa relationship) mostly operates by way of the texts.

However, on the matter of the thematic similarity of art music texts it is necessary to note that many of the compositions in circulation are derivative. The derivation has taken place during the course of history in three ways. Firstly, some major forms of art music have merely lifted compositions established in some other genre. For example many of the khayal-s are 'trimmed' dhrupad-s. They have become khayal-s by casting away the last two of the four customary sections of the dhrupad-s. Secondly, many compositions in various genres are based on the prevailing successful compositions. In fact, a whole class of compositions is known as 'jod' (matching). The matching compositions are so closely mapped on the originals that they often create a momentary identity crisis! Thirdly, a very large number of compositions are full or partial transplants from the oceanic body of saint-poets' writings. It could therefore be deduced that the thematic similarity is a cumulative result of the various ways of derivation of texts.

However, a deeper factor leading to the thematic similarity can hardly be overlooked. Indian art in general has displayed a dependence on the bhakti-sringara (devotion-erotic love) syndrome. Of equal importance is the other pair, namely devgriha-rajgriha (temple and princely court, respectively). While the former pair refers to the motive force of music-making, the latter points to platforms and agencies conducive to actual performance. The quartet could be credited to have brought about the crystallization of the well-known nayika-bhed phenomenon as well as applications of the *rasa*-theory. Examined as a body, texts in art music therefore reveal a closed thematic world. The alleged indifference of texts in Hindustani art music to meaningfulness cannot be easily accepted if the traditional material is properly studied.

As hinted earlier a very important segment of texts in art music is formed by meaningless sound-syllables-vocables. Vocables are chiefly of two kinds: tenashabda-s (auspicious words) and patakshar-s (sound-syllables employed to represent instrumental sounds). Both have a place in melodic and rhythmic music-s. Texts formulated in this manner may or may not be elaborated further. Rhythmic texts employed by players of major percussion instruments such as tabla, pakhawaj are the

relevant examples. However, these texts do not have tunes of their own. When they are presented the background is supplied by a tune. As is known, the lehra-s in tabla solos maintain a stabilized reference-circle. To this extent interrelationship of tune and rhythm-texts seems to be of a secondary intensity. Yet it is no secret that forms in rhythm-music have very often relied on forms of melodic music to acquire a certain inner logic as well as an outer form. Phrasing, idiomatic or structural formulae in rhythm-texts are on many occasions inspired by melodic music.

A kind of rhythm-text and tune relationship not easily recognized is realized through the role played by the basic rhythm-texts such as the theka-s. Theka-s have a significant part in determining the final tone of language-texts in performance. Affective responses elicited via the operations of rhythms are recognizably more compelling than those elicited through melodic formations. Further, the metrical quality of language-texts comes into relief if appropriate rhythm-texts are employed with the former.

Texts in Devotional Music

Devotional music is a product of the sustained musico-literary activity of the saint-poet-composers from the eighth century onwards. Strictly speaking devotional music is subsumed under a broader heading "religious music" and includes many genres such as prarthana (prayer), stotra (hymn), mantra (sacred verse or formula), arati (collectively sung composition in praise of a deity), bhajan (song-type or way of collective rendering of lines or songs of devotional content), and Keertana (devotional story-telling heavily interlaced with music). All of them are more or less suffused with music but a sizeable portion of the corpus has a strong orientation of art music. Devotional music inspired by the Vaishnava philosophy has a special significance vis-à-vis Hindustani music.

Devotional texts circulating at the level of performance are characterized by a pervasive thematic similarity bordering on reiteration. A group of themes recurs almost as a rule irrespective of the language and the musical continuity of the region concerned. Factors contributing to the emotional density and the thematic similarity in devotional music could be noted briefly as follows.

a) The enunciation of the doctrine of bhakti in the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* created types. The fundamental conceptual framework within which the subsequent developments have taken place can be traced to the sutra-s even today.

b) Ashtachap, Chaitanya, Varkari and other cults progressively accumulated a body of compositions from the end of the fourteenth century. The cults introduced anthropomorphic variations on the deity-devotee relationships. For example, the ashtachap highlighted the balkrishna-bhav, the Chaitanya-sampradaya brought into relief the radha-bhav while the varkari-pantha dwelt on the guru and the mata-bhav. Bhav-s in the present context refer to psychological relationships posited between deity-devotees. While the balkrishna-bhav dwelt on Krishna as a divine child and human parents radha-bhav meant divine lover and the human devotee (as a beloved). Mata-bhav refers to God/deity as the mother.

c) Theorization of the nayak-nayika-bhed by Rupa Goswami in his *Ujwal Neelamani* (1500-1600 A.D.) proved influential in the Hindi language belt. Nayak-nayika-bhed refers to an elaborately stated doctrine of devotional love/erotic devotion in which eight types of heroines and corresponding heroes are described in great detail. The typology includes enumeration of externals such as dress, ornaments and internal states of psychological import. Goswami created an authoritative theoretical framework of a pronounced Vaishnava character and in the process touched upon philosophy, poetics and rasa-oriented aesthetics.

In addition to the thematic similarity the devotional texts reveal some interesting compositional features having a bearing on tunes and tones. For instance,

i) Mudra (stamp, face) is inevitably present. From among the numerous 'indicative' functions of the mudra devotional music seems to favour the mention of the composer's name, guru's and/or composer's name and the name of the deity. Mudra is not detected in folk music though it is regularly employed in art music.

ii) Devotional texts are composed in regional languages. However the proportion of tadbhav (derived) and tatsama (similar) words is considerable. As a consequence devotional texts succeed in combining variety, regional penetration and a pan-Indian acceptability. Almost each region in the country has developed a devotional repertoire of its own, a fact to be remembered while estimating the spread in India of the ability to comprehend musicality in general.

iii) Devotional texts employ metrical moulds of prakrit origin. It has been pointed out that metres of non-Sanskrit tradition have innate musical qualities.

iv) Textual moulds employed in devotional music prove conducive to oral composition. However, this does not prevent their being written down, a characteristic shared with art music.

Texts in Folk Music

- 1) Anonymity of the folk musical text is very noticeable.
- 2) Vocabularies/words/phrases play an important role. Their significance is explained variously.
- 3) A number of folk texts indicate a linkage with movement (often leading to dance)
- 4) A greater variety of metrical moulds exists in folk texts as compared to the devotional and art musical texts. The feature is perhaps traceable to the dance-linkage.
- 5) The thematic diversity of folk texts is impressive. Texts of apparent contrastive contents coexist. This is perhaps due to contrastive motivation folk texts enjoy. For example folk motivation includes bi-polarities such as religious-secular, didactic-entertaining, and functional-expressive.
- 6) Examined modality-wise, folk texts cover a wide span between sheer prose to extreme lyricism.

Texts in Popular Music

Popular music is a very accommodative category in many respects. The texts too reflect that characteristic. As is known, popular music includes film music as its major subdivision.

- 1) While considering texts in popular music the emergence of a song as a genre within the category is of special significance. The song evolved a particular kind of relationship between music and literature. Adhunik gan in Bengal, bhavgeet in Maharashtra or geet in the Hindi regions need to be remembered in this context.
- 2) The vogue of short, catchy and isolable phrasing in textual and rhythmic as well as melodic aspects is to be credited to the category under discussion. Jingles and slogans would easily come to mind. Popular texts emulate the directness of proverbs, the brevity of sutra-s and the wit of aphorisms.

II: Tunes

When discussion is focused on tunes of and for the texts the first item to attract attention is the matter of metres. This is so chiefly because Indian metres have a unique feature: in addition to being frameworks for versification, they are melodic moulds. In this context the phenomena known as chal, chalan, tarz and the like become relevant. This text-tune combination is obtained in Sanskrit as well as the Prakrit metres. Further, tunes vary with metres and not with texts.

However, it must be admitted that the tune-text relationship is not discerned in musical categories. In the latter metrical tunes are set aside in favour of new and melodic moulds superimposed on the textual material which otherwise displays metrical organization. Metrical material thus dissociated from its innate musical framework probably generates as aesthetic tensions which may prove worth analyzing.

Tunes in Art Music

Art music registers two opposite tendencies in respect of metre. While rhythm-texts and compositions in certain forms (e.g. dhruvad) adhere to a metrical design, an equally strong movement away from metrical designs is perceived in many other forms.

A very fundamental reason is of course the essentially melodic as opposed to the prosodic way of conceiving the material. In art music a pattern is not conceived as a verse in metre but as a composition in or without tala. In case of melodic patterns the rhythm-frame (metrical or otherwise) is manipulated. Texts are bent to the demands of the tunes. Some standard ways in which tunes exploit texts can be easily noted:

- i) End-rhymes are abundantly used to emphasize musical terminations.
- ii) Alliteration and assonance are introduced purposefully to create musical effects or nadamadhurya as the description goes.
- iii) Sounds helpful in projection are given a preferential treatment. In fact in the interests of projection sounds usually regarded as unstretchable are also stretched. In addition stressable sounds are favoured for enhancing the rhythmic quality in music.
- iv) Text is often enveloped with a nasal quality to aid a pointed intonation.

v) Words functioning as exclamations, interjections and address-words are repeatedly interpolated into texts. The procedure creates openings for evocative phrases or passages.

vi) Mukhda exemplifies a very important tune-based manipulation of the text. Mukhda is a regular though an optional reiteration of a segment of a composition. The reiterations mark completions of successive musical ideas. It is through the mukhda that a tala-cycle is manipulated. In fact mukhda serves a number of aesthetic and structural functions and deserves a close examination.

vii) It has already been suggested that compositions in art music move out of metricality when the textual material is not selected from the existing and metrically organized literature. If poetry taxes a poetic license with language, art music may be said to enjoy a musical license with poetry! Texts in art music reflect the power of tune as the chief controlling agency in matters of imagery, vocabulary and metrics etc.

viii) However, a tune may rely on the text for the initial selection of the tonal contour or outline or the raga for the text. In a majority of cases the initial tune-selection is based on a conscious or an unconscious acceptance of the musicological raga-rasa relationship (which however is often thrown to the winds during the course of performance!) Text is thus made an excuse of! Semi-classical music however reveals a more consistent approach in this respect, relying mostly on the principle of correspondence.

ix) It may be added that the medieval musicological discussions on the composer's status make a direct reference to the text-tune relationship.

Tunes in Devotional Music

a) Devotional music predictably displays a balancing of individual and collective urges in the handling of melodic and rhythmic resources. There are in-built provisions for concerted and unvarying renderings as also for the individual and improvised expression.

b) A notable feature is the use of a limited number of raga-s of a certain group associated with certain qualities and affective states. In the matter of tala-s too their limited number and the specific character is noteworthy.

c) The tune-moulds associated with metres are not entirely neglected. Broadly speaking, items meant for recitation retain the associated melodic mould while those that are 'sung' put aside the metrical tunes.

d) Certain technical features are also noted. For example tihai-s are used effectively to carry out functions such as indicating the structural sections, marking entry and exit of choral element, preparing for a change of modality etc. Purposeful and predictable use of tod-procedures also belongs to the same type of technicality.

e) In some forms, quick and qualitative changes from prose to poetry, narration to enactment and recitation to singing are registered. Tunes undergo a considerable transformation as a consequence.

Tunes in Folk Music

a) Tunes in this category have an astounding variety and yet repetitiousness within an item is a prominent feature!

b) A very wide spectrum of musicality, from the minimal to the maximal is covered in the category. The feature is obviously related to the wide variety in texts and the modality-range of the category. As an entity folk music presents a continua on all dimensions. Perhaps this is the reason for its wide appeal.

c) Folk rhythms are more distinctive than folk melodies. The former are aptly described as ardha-tala-s. The performing implications are: i) they do not encourage rhythmic developments or elaborations. ii) they depend more on short and attractive chalan-s (movements or the isolable basic patterns) than on complex structuring of the latter in larger wholes expected to be elaborated further.

d) Folk-tunes intended for solo performances would be nearer to art music while those designed for a concerted rendering would have closer relationship with the primitive category of musical experience.

Tunes in Popular Music

a) All-inclusiveness is a predominant feature of the category. It is a musical store-house in character.

b) Unfortunately film-music is over represented in the category. Film-music as a genre, needs a separate discussion on account of its pervasiveness, expansiveness and variousness.

c) Popular tunes are extremely flexible in their relationship to the texts. Correspondence, contrast as well as total indifference to the text have been noticed.

d) Film music poses special problems in text-tune-tone relationship because the genre also exemplifies image-text-music confluence. Film music and within it the film-song have faced changing compulsions with recognizable effects on the end-product.

III: Tone

While explaining the term 'tone' as it is understood in the present context two premises were stated. Firstly it was pointed out that the confluence of text, tune and tone leads directly to a discussion of the affective aspect and hence to the rasa-theory. Secondly, it was also noted that Indian musical reality demands discussion of five musical categories, namely, primitive, folk, devotional, art and popular.

The rasa-music relationship has been examined repeatedly. But it must be admitted that chiefly art music has been thought about. Perhaps this is to be expected. The categorical pentad is obviously a result of a comparatively later musico-aesthetic appraisal of the total musical reality. Under the circumstances a category wise discussion of 'tone' can hardly be accommodated in the present idea-paper. It is on this background that some formulations are put forward.

1. On account of the heavy literary bias the rasa-theory remains unconvincing in respect of wordless music-s and music-s employing vocables.
2. Equations postulated between rasa and art-music have been based on operations of the linguistic and literary content.
3. During the processes of actual music-making - i.e. performance and music-receiving, rasa-theory and the corpus of the related terminology enjoys only a random mention and use. In fact there appears to be in operation a rang-theory regarded as relevant to the three performing arts.
4. In brief the theory could be described as 1) an audience-oriented schema in which the movement towards 2) impact as well as the ultimate impact of a performed work on the

a) creator, b) created and the c) receiver occupy important places. The theory implies use of 3) a multi-criteria method which ensures evolution and use of 4) sets of criteria relevant to categories and forms. Occasionally one gets a feeling that rang, the ultimate aim, is regarded as anand. This is especially so when music comes into being due to devotional impulses. However if the performing tradition is examined the rang-theory would seem to be employed to indicate the degree of excellence of a performance rather than to suggest the quality or the specific character of the affective response. It must be added that the theory accepts the possibility of rang without the affective response in the usual sense of the term.

5. An important fall-out of the rang-theory has been the systematic and varied groupings of the emerging criteria into gharana-s. Understood as wide-based, performance-oriented ideological musico-aesthetic structures, gharana-s can hardly be confined to art-music. The fact is borne out by the practice, terminology, training procedures of the performers in other categories of music.

6. It needs to be noted that music-making in the non-art categories elicits on many occasions affective responses of religio-magical nature and which lack in musico-aesthetic significance. Though the triad under discussion is in evidence on such occasions musicologists ignore the events as lacking in musical dimension.

Conclusion

For all practical purposes a musico-aesthetic study of texts, tunes and tones have a long tradition in India. However it must be noted with the advent of the new mass-media the equations of sensory perceptions have changed. The five musical categories are exposed to new cultural drives and aesthetic tensions. Families of art, hierarchies of art-forms, and criteria of judgment are undergoing changes. Components of musical experience and their inter-relationships therefore compel a new look. The triad examined here is only one of such interrelationships.