

Indian Sound of Music

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India, musically speaking, is a highly literate nation. In India, we grow up with different kinds of music. In fact, there are five kinds of music which have been flourishing simultaneously in India over past so many centuries. The five main streams of Indian music are - primitive (adima), folk (lok), religious (dharma), art (kala) and popular (jana). The visual here shows the progression of these streams in the form of concentric circles with the source of music (represented by a pair of hands) and the receiver of music (represented by a pair of ears) at the centre. Music can be created only when both these entities exist. The movement from the smaller to the bigger circles represent wider range of variations. For example, folk music is much more narrowly defined than religious music.

In India, whatever be the region there will always be more than one category of music in vogue. Had George Orwell known Indian music well enough, he might have said, "All Indian regions are music-equal but some are more music-equal than others!" The more the number of musical categories coexist in a region, the more musically fertile that region is likely to be. It wouldn't have been necessary to belabour the point, had we not started, in recent times, to stereotype our idea of Indian music to only raga/tala based music. The practice of calling our raga/ tala based music, classical music reeks of a colonial mindset. It is the western world which associated Indian art music with classical age and thereby imparting a somewhat fossilised, rigid image to it. Indian art music has little to do with chronology, but it has everything to do with the search of an Indian form of aesthetics.

Coming back to the five forms of music, they allow us to experience five different states of the mind. Therein lies their cultural value. In fact, I will go to the extent of suggesting that sangeet panchak (musical pentad) has emerged as a result of the existence of five different levels of human emotional states (more on these emotional states in the coming issues). These five different music streams flow side by side in us. Each influencing the others. Their relationships are innate and inexorable. In this issue, I want to discuss primitive music in some length. In the subsequent issues, I

will discuss folk, religious, art and popular music, each one with its corresponding emotional state.

Primitive music does not mean tribal music. It is not about who produces music. A particular form of music is primitive because it displays certain musical features. It has those features because it wants to communicate a definite musical and more importantly, cultural experience.

Take disco music. It is a primitive form of music. I'm not using the word 'primitive' in a pejorative sense here. Strong rhythms, rough timbres, minimal use of language and repetitive use of sound syllables evoke an undifferentiated emotive state. One wants to feel the music physically. It drowns one's sense of identity. The pent-up tension and stress get shaken off. No wonder, disco music enjoys mass appeal. Primitive music is the most untutored and instinctive form of music. You can't play it with your mind. You will have to play it with your senses. It is highly accessible and somewhat raw in its appeal. I personally find it somewhat hypnotic. I'm sure. many others dancing in the dark in discotheques will readily agree with me.
