

From Sankara to Fusion: An Indian Musical Spectrum

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In India the term *sankara*, traditionally speaking, has negative connotations. Due to historical and cultural reasons, it has been regarded an undesirable mixture, dilution or hybridisation. On the other hand, fusion is today a prestige word. With fusion are associated positive developments and happy images such as 'a capacity to lead to newer unions' and 'a release of massive energy'. As far as the Indian musical scene is concerned, both *sankara* and fusion represent genuine responses to what is happening. There are some who decry the musical intermingling taking place as *sankara*, while others welcome the activity. Obviously, the time is ripe to consider the Indian musical situation through larger conceptual perspectives offered by musico-cultural studies, now validly and collectively described as ethnomusicology.

Apart from the abundance and variety of musical traditions and genres in India, the country also boasts of a long and alive historical 'past'. Performing arts have a tendency not to allow complete breaks in traditions. Often, a kind of subterranean existence of performing concepts and practices characterise traditions. This does not negate the constant and ongoing processes of musical change at multiple levels.

I have pointed out elsewhere (Ranade 1992: 9-10) that cultures can come together in at least four different, though connected, ways. I describe the modes as juxtaposition, confrontation, borrowing and conscious/unconscious assimilation. Of interest is the fact that music may also come together in equally varied modes—sometimes consequent to movements in non-musical areas of the parent culture or sometimes independent of them. In fact, one of the most provoking ethnomusicological insights is that in normal circumstances, music is the last life aspect to change, and when it does, it is symptomatic of deeper and fundamental cultural changes. When such changes become too obvious to miss, it is already too late for Jeremiads in music to sing their elegies! On the other hand, if and when cultural thinkers care to listen—with their inner ears as well—they are likely to find music actually useful in making a prognosis, rather than a diagnosis, of many socio-cultural ills. The coming together of various musics, taking place in India now due to globalisation, media explosion, new

social realignments and so on, is hardly definable in simple terms and binary modes generated by either/or attitudes that appear to colour our efforts in construing cultural events.

Keeping in mind the chronological length, phenomenal breadth and the experiential depth of music in India, one can look at contemporary development with a set of questions: Is the coming together of musics new to India? Are the factors leading to this situation unique to the present moment? Are we justified in giving so much weightage to the '50-year-span' in the Indian context? What are the specific reasons that should prompt us to press panic buttons in considering cultural situations in general and musical situations in particular? In this article, I propose to develop and illustrate the point that the current scenario of heavy inter-category mixing of music is not unique and that in the historical past we have many examples of mutual exchange, shifts in emphasis and radical transitions. The diverse and seemingly chaotic developments in the contemporary musical scene can be comprehended and evaluated through the three structural aspects of tone, tempo and language, which are applicable to all the categories of music, namely, primitive, folk, popular, religious and art music.

Categories of Music in India

One special feature of the increasing coming together of types of music in India is what I choose to call an inter-category circulation of musical material. It needs to be appreciated that in India primitive, folk, religious, popular and art music constitute experiential and structural categories that are not producer oriented. Before I proceed to develop my substantive argument, perhaps it would be useful to note the salient features of these five music categories.

Primitive Music or Aadima Sangeet

This is a kind of composite expression often combining singing with the playing of instruments and dancing. This is perhaps connected with the fact that it represents an attempt to respond to three natural cycles that largely determine the course of life-the cycles of day and night, birth and death, and the seasons. On account of this larger relationship, aadima music is not made for its own sake and appears to be directed at some higher power, including nature. The evocative function of music is reflected in the special regard displayed for rituals: they have a place in the conception, presentation as well as the preservation of music.

It is not an exaggeration to say that aadima music means music for everyone, everything and for every occasion. General participation is encouraged to such an extent in the making of aadima music that there is a near absence of audience as a separate entity: no one is entirely engaged in listening. The role of the community as such is so vital that the cultural group or the community rather than the solitary composer is said to be responsible for creating music. Normally all activities stressing the collective aspect of human life depend on rhythm as a binding agent. It is, therefore, natural that this music gives more scope to rhythm than melody. Very often the former is also more attractive.

By and large, the category holds songs to be more important than music, and yet primitive song can hardly be fitted into the usually accepted definition of song! This is so chiefly because of the norms applied in the category.

To make, receive or appreciate aadima music, certain identifiable criteria are applied and sweetness is certainly not one of them! This point needs to be stressed because most people assume that all music has to be invariably sweet. This is as valid as expecting good food to always be sweet. The category holds sounds to be important as sounds. This is in contrast to the general tendency prefer sound only if it is meaningful, as in language.

Very often primitive music stands for something else outside and a very pervasive symbolism can therefore be detected. In some respects, aadima music keeps very close to day-to-day life and its different aspects. One of the interesting consequences is that ordinary objects and procedures may be used in music-making. It is logical to assume that the sense of hearing would rule supreme in any musical activity. However, in primitive music, the sense of touch also strongly comes into play. For example, holding hands, stamping on the ground, body thumping and so on become notable contributors to the final result.

Folk Music

Broadly speaking, each of the well-defined linguistic regions of the country has its own folk music and, hence, many researchers now emphasise plurality while discussing folk music. Certain features, however, appear to be common to all regional traditions, a fact indicating the pan-Indian nature of the category as also the essential unity of Indian culture as such.

When compared with the primitive, the folk category is distinguished by a clear dominance of melodic songs. An elaborate and technically sound definition of 'song' is very complex and is not being attempted here. But two salient song features can easily be identified: first, it should consist of sustained, unbroken sounds; and, second, it should be 'hummable'.

Instrumental music enjoys a kind of ubiquity in the folk category of music. It is almost everywhere and yet it cannot be said to enjoy an independent position. Instruments are pressed into service mostly to accompany singers/dancers. Even when music is made solo, instruments try to follow or imitate music originally composed for or produced by human voices. The effectiveness and the musical value of musical instruments is judged according to their capacity to approximate vocal music.

Collectivity reigns supreme in creation, presentation, reception and also perhaps in preservation of folk music. Folk music is meant for the entire body of an organised human group bound by specific cultural ties, indicating commonality of language, geographical location, social convention and so on. Folk music emerges, circulates and lives as their expression.

A number of items in folk music are linked to certain nonmusical activities, tasks or actions in a definite manner. For example, in many regions of India, harvesting and pounding of corn and similar chores have songs associated with them. This is described as the functionality of folk music. Functionality means that the association between music and the tasks mentioned is not a vague psychological or accidental coexistence of the two. but a firmer mutual relationship that goes beyond mere suggestivity. Very often these non-musical activities provide purpose as well as structure to folk music and make the forms functional. The feature usually makes the concerned music more immediate and endows it with a direct appeal not easily paralleled.

It has often been said that folk music has no beginning and no perceivable end. The remark is obviously intended to emphasise the element of continuity it enjoys. Cultural groups can rarely be firmly and exactly placed on the time and space axis. Hence, their music, that is, folk music, is also expected to flow on and become one with the life of the community. This is why it is described as eternal.

Contrary to common perception, folk music does change, though selectively. It accepts changes in certain aspects, while in some others it is extremely reluctant to do so. For example, those facets and forms oriented towards entertaining are prone to

change faster than the religious or ritualistic aspects. Referring to strictly musical contexts, for instance, rhythms change less readily than melodies or tunes.

Folk music tends to maintain a two-way relationship with the contemporary art music of the land. Some features of art music percolate to folk music, or folk musicians try to borrow, change or assimilate them. On the other hand, history is full of instances where art music seized select aspects of folk music, to polish or refine them for an easier accommodation in its own existing codified systems. This is why features of art and folk music are detected in one another. Thus, many ragas are 'found' in Indian folk music, while folk flourishes, rhythms and so on have been espied in the repertoires of art musicians.

A cultural group and its folk music are so intimately connected as to legitimately claim to be the national expression of the concerned community. Normally, nations are understood to be homogeneous as political or cultural entities, and to that extent folk music can be described as a national expression. However, in a country like India, each region has its own folk music even though the regions taken together form a nation. Various folk musics are therefore to be understood as systems representing regional identities severally. If a nation is defined as a cohesive cultural unit irrespective of its place in the hierarchy of political set-ups, then folk music in India may be called a national expression.

Folk music, as expected, allocates meaningful roles to both language and literature. Stories and songs are brought together and a unique phenomenon of song-cycles or its variants assumes importance in the total corpus of folk music.

Popular Music

Popular music can be defined as a product of many subcultures that coexist and interact in a society. New waves of migrants, temporary fascination with cults or political movements, sudden exposure to new musical formulae are some of the more obvious factors conducive to the making of popular music. A growing middle class and acceleration of the processes of urbanisation also contribute to the making of popular music. Concepts of leisure time, desire and capacity for recreation, and a pressing demand for entertainment create an industry to make music.

The mass media functions as a major shaping influence. Media language, time restrictions/allocation, transmission facilities and such other operational features govern the form as well as content of popular music. An increase in population and

demographic redistribution generally encourage generation and spread of popular musical products.

The music of this category is patently patron oriented. Consequently, every change in patronage is reflected more readily news than elsewhere. No other category is so inexorably ruled by market economy as is popular music. Demand and supply, distribution and profit margin forcefully come into play. Fashions, topical interests and prohibitions operate to determine almost every aspect of music. The target audience is less selective and the term 'mass' indicates a rather indiscriminating body of receivers of this music. In the final analysis, it is sociocultural and not aesthetic criteria that become more relevant in popular music.

Religious Music

In India, religious music is largely synonymous with devotional music or bhakti sangeet. Devotional music as a category came into existence largely as a result of the work of saint poets and their Followers in different regions of the country. To begin with, the saint poets were composers devoted to either Shiva or Vishnu. though in the later centuries deities as well as cult loyalties became more diverse. The saint poets composed, sang and passed on thousands of songs through oral tradition. Their songs became the common property of the land and the people. They continue to serve as models even for contemporary efforts in composing devotional songs. Compositions in this category are in different regional languages collectively known as the Prakrits (in contrast with Sanskrit). According to many experts, the Prakrit tongues are inherently more musical.

Devotional music exhibits some easily identifiable structural features. Compositions in the category invariably carry the name of the composer in the last line. Names of the guru as well as the worshipped deity also find a mention. Predictably, the metrical moulds employed by the saint poets are of Prakrit origin. One special metrical feature of the Prakrit tradition (apart from the notable variety) is the inherent flexibility, which renders the metres more conducive to making music. An uninhibited stretching of individual words, midline breaks, variable line lengths and other such features obviously allow more freedom to composers as well as performers. Rhythms employed in this category are less expansive. For example, in most cases they have four beats (or multiples of four). Rhythmic cycles thus constructed are easy to grasp. Rhythms in as category are therefore aptly described as 'catchy'. Rhythms have always proved more effective than melodies in reaching out to the masses.

In terms of melody, too, the category gives priority to mass appeal. Devotional melodies often have structures describable as dhun ragas. These are ragas with identifiable and recurring tonal phrases, which are free from the constraints imposed by the rigid grammatical frameworks usually displayed by full-fledged ragas. Further, dhun ragas used are noticeably similar to melodies often classified as regional on account of their origin or due to the greater circulation they seem to enjoy in particular geographical areas. For example, melodies like pahadi, kafi, des and mand unambiguously declare their regional affiliations. In addition, devotional music also employs seasonal melodies that have a long and widespread tradition in the country. Names of ragas such as malhar, hindol and des remind us of this link.

A judicious mixture of solo and choral modes of rendering is evident in this category. Audiences participate in making music according to the norms (usually unwritten) prescribed in the tradition. For example, iteration of a deity's name and hailing the God or guru become points at which the entire congregation joins in lustily. Predictable, regular and noticeable audience participation makes the music intense. A great majority of the musical instruments used in the category act as generators of rhythmic pulses. This is remarkably so even in the case of instruments ostensibly designed to function as melodic. For example, string instruments often supply rhythm beats in addition to the drone or melody they produce. It is also true that instruments in this category are easily given to grosser musical effects and are low on nuances, subtleties and sophistications. As many musicians have succinctly pointed out, 'devotional instruments require less maintenance'.

Indian devotional music surges in two streams, one of them flows nearer to art music while the other remains closer to folk music.

Art Music

Performers in this category intentionally strive to attain aesthetic or artistic goals. In return, they also expect aesthetic appreciation from the audience. It will not be incorrect to say that in a concert of Hindustani art music, the most crucial test a listener has to pass is to express his approval/disapproval of the musical proceedings at the right moment and in a proper manner.

One of the most distinctive features of art music is its flow in two concurrent streams: the scholastic and the performing. The former stream formulates, systematises and records rules expected to govern musical operations in the category, while the

second is related to actual presentations. In the long run, the latter outpaces the former—a case that has a parallel in literature and grammar, too.

Art music deliberately concentrates on expressing itself entirely (or mostly) through the auditory channel. To that extent, it is more abstract, unlike folk or primitive music, both of which are concrete on account of their appeal to many senses, in addition, of course, to the auditory.

Art music affords more scope to individuals than to groups. The predominance of the solo mode in the Hindustani system is to be placed in this context. An individual performer is consequently allowed more freedom. He can elaborate or improvise on the basic musical structures according to his own aesthetic intentions and ideas. Thus, unlike the collective quality of folk, primitive and devotional music, art music tends to emphasise the individuality of the artist.

This category displays an impressive array of forms or genres of music. In Hindustani music, for example, dhrupad, dhamar, khayal, tarana, trivat, gat and peshkar are among the different forms of music. Such variety also exists in other musical categories, but those in the art category result largely from aesthetic and musicological considerations.

It is in this category that styles, schools, guru-shishya lineages and other systems have been set up with more deliberation. Codification becomes mandatory, as also the conscious verbalisation of rules to be meticulously followed. Also notable is the fact that theoretical, grammatical and expository works in the category are written, as is to be expected, in a scholastic tradition.

It is, of course, obvious that an overall sweetness, appeal of evocative words and gestures, and other such factors will fascinate the listener, irrespective of his knowledge of music. And yet, being product of human effort at its imaginative best, it helps to know the norms that channelise, govern and guide art music and musicians. To a certain degree, music making is like participating in a game you can play and enjoy if you know the rules. Otherwise, you have to rest content with the thrill, the physicality and the exhilaration you feel when blood circulates faster and limbs move smoothly.

Art music often joins hands with other artistic efforts realised in painting, drama, dance, etc. to devise new combinations for attaining new artistic goals. At the same time, it needs to assert its independence and achieve aesthetic excellence. Hence it also attempts to sever its connection with the other arts or areas of life. This aspect of its functioning becomes clear when schools of art music, forms and styles are discussed.

Almost as a corollary to the features enumerated so far, art music claims a kind of autonomy. It, therefore, tries to move away from the incidents, events and processes that characterise our daily life. With equal alacrity, it also shies away from personal (as distinct from individual) joys and sorrows. In some measure this detachment from the mundane makes its appeal more enduring. Herein lies the secret of the longevity of ragas, talas and bandishes in Hindustani art music.

Musical Exchanges, Shifts and Transitions

From this background, it would become obvious that never before in the past have we seen so heavy a musical exchange between the five categories of music as we are witnessing in recent decades. Ideas, instruments, idioms, imagery and the like are moving from one category to the other with remarkable ease and sometimes as a result of notable deliberation and craftsmanship. Admittedly, the results are not always as satisfying as intended, and sometimes the motivation itself may be suspect! However, use, abuse and misuse must be distinguished and deviation ought to be understood as an inevitable step towards creativity. Only then would the scene cease to be painful and puzzling.

For obvious reasons, I choose not to go far back in ancient Indian music or look back with nostalgia to the middle ages, which were far from dark. However, even a cursory examination would reveal that what is happening today has close parallels in many early periods. Coming together of different musics and the consequent changes in music are not new to us. For example, sama music was shaped by musical moulds often alien to the composers of the Rgvedic hymns who then processed them for conversion into samas for musical rendering. In other words, there were tunes, already existing, as if hovering in the air. They were so well entrenched in people's minds that the Aryan composers found it wise to use communicating units rather than reject them as alien. For the sacred music of the Aryans, music of non-Aryan origin was no taboo.

Another interesting instance of the musical tradition's openness to the alien can be seen in Bharata's general injunction that music cannot be composed with four or less notes. And yet the perceptive sage refers to Shabaradi tribes as users of such music. With his wholehearted acceptance of the lokadharmi mode of theatric presentation, he had no hesitation in taking note of this music of minimal structure. I am sure that he would not have been averse to using it if the theatric occasion so demanded.

And what about the notable shift from venu culture to veena culture in ancient India, as also to the general upward musical contour, that is, aroha, instead of

the downward, *avaroha*, of the ancient *sama* *gayan*? Why did it become necessary for the *Naradiya Shiksha*, the earliest work in India to examine music in a spirit of scientific inquiry, to describe positions of musical intervals in terms of correspondences between voice and *venu*? Organological symbolism indicates that *venu*-centred culture presents a more primitive, elemental and undifferentiated cultural state. On the other hand, *veena* bespeaks of a notably differentiated, sophisticated and stratified society as well as culture. Does this not point to a radical change in musical temper at a very early period, and that too as a result of greater exchange of cultures? Perhaps the argument can be elaborated a little more without delving deep into too many musicological details.

Vedic Phase: From Venu to Veena

The *Rgveda* can be left aside, as it does not mention *veena*, though there was an identifiable chordophone called *vana* that accompanied singing and probably dancing. In the present context, it is, of course, the *Sama Veda* that needs looking into. There are clear references to the role of *veena* as an accompanying instrument for vocal music in the related literature.

However, I suggest that the most significant change in this connection happened when a radical departure was made from the descending order of *sama* music to orient it upwards. A rather speculative query is: was this due to a more purposeful and firm recourse to *veena* as an accompanying instrument- the change referred to being a switch-over from *venu* to *veena*?. Less speculatively, one notes that *Naradiya Shiksha*, which codified the singing of *sama* music, felt it essential to equate *sama* notes with their placements on *veena*, indicating thereby the increasing importance of *veena* and the receding role of *venu* in the kind of music made. As the pioneering organologist, the late Dr. B.C. Deva (1977:10) pointed out, referring to the strategy of 'fixing' musical scales with the help of string lengths, 'It is perhaps doubtful if there could have been a stable musicology without instruments.' Other sources on *vedic* music, namely, the *Brahmana*, *Aranyaka*, *Upanishad* and *Sutra* literature confirm this 'upward' trend of music as also the increasing role of *veena* (which was mostly of the bowed-harp type) Classical organology speaks of four main types of chordophones, namely, *zithers*, *lutes*, *harps* and *lyres*. In simple terms, the early Indian preference was for the plucked, horizontal-stringed, bow-type *veena*.

This, however is, not the place to go into the history of the *sama* music, which, during its evolution, allocated differing roles to the *veena*. It suffices to note that *sama* music obviously passed through phases, perhaps successively, in which music

was based on forms identified as richa, gatha and sama. Rendering of the first kind (archik) employed one note, the second (gathik) consisted of two notes and the third (samik) was extended to three (and later more notes. However, the decision to abandon venu and opt in favour of a greater role for the veena was obviously not related to availability of a greater number of notes, because there is no reason to assume that the gamut of venu was too restricted. By all accounts, the veena accompanying the sama music was not a bowed variety. The musico-cultural resolve to effect a changeover from a blown wind instrument to a plucked string instrument, therefore, meant an interesting change of strategy, keen on a different timbre and dynamics (that is, variation in force or intensity). Inducting the softer tones of veena in music making to enrich the timbre spectrum under exploration was not an isolated act. It is instructive to note that in vocalisation also a similar concern for timbre and dynamics was apparent. For example, samas audible at close quarters were known as deva or sarvaparaksha samhita. Those rendered in high pitch and audible from afar were described as asur or sarvapratyaksha samhita, while those exploring the middle ranges were called rishi or paroksha-pratyaksha samhita. Yet another classification of samas impresses because of its direct reference to timbre. According to it, singing in bass voice was known as devahu, to do so in thin/weak tone was called vakvashahu, while that which resembled crying aloud was described as amitrahu. To carry this line of thinking further, a question can be raised: why was the changeover made? What could have been the compulsions?

One could attempt a response on the following lines: First, sama music gradually came to connote vocalisation identified as singing, that is, an act of music making very elaborate in comparison with the richa chanting. The richa chanting was, in brief, a minimal movement away from an unadorned prose, a unilinear delivery of the sacred material or message. Chanting, as deviation from prose, has limited musical aspirations. It generates minimal music. Hence, when a desire to elaborate musical ideas arose (which sama music was trying to project), it became necessary to change the supporting musical agent. Veena obviously proved more amenable to the production of a greater variety of timbres, whether the intention was to correspond or contrast with the vocal tones used.

Second, unlike venu, veena made it possible for the samagahs (the singers of the samas) to accompany themselves. This mode naturally indicates music making that demands closer and more purposeful coordination of the main and secondary channels engaged to express musical ideas. It also suggested a different kind of approach to the patterning of the available body of musical sounds. Simultaneity of different notes,

phrases and tempos became possible. As sama music was not, it is speculated, accompanied by rhythm instruments, this observation assumes additional importance. Authorities have enumerated the kinds of veenas in use during the period of sama singing. They have also debated the exact nature of some of the instruments mentioned. Differences in instrumental holds, compositions played on them, processes of making them and other such features have been attended to. However, some significant points about the voice-music relationship need to be separately stated. In my opinion, the following are noteworthy.

The veenas employed were mostly plucked/strummed polychords (that is, instruments having separate strings for each different note). As such, they generated discontinuous sounds unlike the sustained and unbroken vocal lines projected by the samagahs. It could be said that the result must have been of running two adjacent, independent and simultaneous music streams adding notably to the tonal colour. Perhaps, there was an opportunity to produce supportive (that is, non-identical) melodies.

Singers often accompanied themselves on the veena - a felt need or desire obviously impossible to satisfy on venu. It is worth noting that even in a later period Nayak Bakshu was reportedly rated high as a musician because he accompanied himself on the pakhawaj!

In view of the fact that a number of veenas had numerous strings, their employment obviously resulted in more complex music.

It is to be stressed that though the instrument was probably not allowed musical freedom, it appears to toe a different line regarding timbre and perhaps draws separate tonal contours, too. In the final analysis, this would hardly mean that it had a subsidiary role.

The foregoing discussion on venu and veena was an organological detour of an illustrative sort made to sensitise one to look at technical/musical/performing changes from a cultural perspective. It brings home to us the complexity of the situation and the need for careful analysis.

Recent Trends of Assimilation and Change

There are scores of historical examples in all musical categories, recording how Indian musical culture has encountered, assimilated and changed itself under the

impact of an alien culture- if and when the motivation was adequate. Musical changes are always, in the final analysis, voluntary. A society makes music it chooses to. Music cannot be imposed from outside-like uniforms, languages, currencies or even political systems. To anticipate a little, once a culture has chosen what is to be its song, musical changes are inevitable.

Structure of Musical Changes

Some basic tenets of musical changes and the reasons prompting them are briefly discussed. In this context, three structural aspects can be identified as basic: tonal material, tempo and words or language. Of course, presentation formats, distribution of performing sets, audience composition, patronage hierarchy and other such features are also to be considered for a deeper analysis. However, attention to the basic constructional trinity is adequate to make the position clear. Further, the fundamental character of these features may elicit observations that will successfully cross cultural boundaries, historical divisions and geographical borders.

Tone

The first feature, the tonal material, consists of individual sounds accepted by a culture as 'notes'. In the next phase, notes are brought together according to organisational principles preferred by the concerned culture. The question often asked (and the response to which is being repeatedly refined – in other words, postponed!) is: are there sounds that are inherently, and therefore universally, musical? Is it possible to have a music of and for the whole of humankind? Is there a universal language of music, agreed to and understood by human cultures the world over irrespective of language, religion, caste, race, etc.? A somewhat simplified answer in respect of tonal material is as brief as a Sanskrit aphorism. It says: 'Consonances are universal and scales are man-made.' In other words, for various reasons, no music of any culture is satisfied with consonances alone. The history of music the world over stands witness to repeated acts of legitimising intervals once regarded dissonant, that is, unfit for music. The moral is clear: there cannot be music that is inherently musical and universally acceptable. Cultures obviously prefer not to be consonant and thereby universal, because this choice enables them to express themselves as themselves. It is as if individual cultures are intent on persuading others to accord them a status of distinct entities through notes, tunes and tones that are not customarily accepted as consonant. Even at the cost of producing music that is less than agreeable, all cultures strive to create, preserve and project their respective identities and persuade others to regard them as such. It was

certainly perceptive of Plato to note that 'tones are persuasive'. In other words, if a culture is heard to try out (or cry out for) 'new sounds' as components of new tunes and tones, it is a sign of its intention to undergo a change of identity. Simultaneously, it is also an expression of the desire that the culture should be acknowledged as initiator of the transforming act. Further, and more importantly, the need to compose new songs (closely bound with the desire for new sounds) is symptomatic of the craving to point to changes - desired as also actual - in the prevailing social hierarchy. It is necessary to realise that songs are at once a parameter and a barometer of deeper cultural changes. To put it baldly, the phenomenon of song is actually located at the end of a long exploratory curve, which consists of processes designed and destined to find musical correlatives for cultural compulsions. A sociocultural group may, for example, complete its march towards a new song by passing through the generally successive phases of murmuring humming, chanting, reciting, singing and song composing.

Does contemporary Indian culture, intensely desirous of a new song, feel that its melodic thinking is constrained by the dominating *raga* philosophy? Perhaps I should put the question temporarily aside, for later consideration, after covering some more ground.

Tempo

And what about the second component of the basic musical structure— tempo? It is necessary to avoid the temptation to rush to the universally appealing term 'rhythm'. Rhythm, in reality, represents a much more sophisticated, processed and culture-conditioned concept than tempo. Tempo is a result of manipulating durations', that is, distances between time divisions. We are obliged to divide time in order to comprehend and manipulate it. This is how and why, the three basic tempos, namely, slow, medium and fast, are discussed and used. It is instructive to note that despite repeated and widespread attempts to find objective measurement for the three tempos, Indian musicology in general has settled on the principle of the 'relativity of tempo' (as also of pitch, it helps to remember). Therefore, for Indian music makers, and in traditional musical thinking, slow tempo is half the medium, which, in its turn, is double the slow and, finally, fast is double the medium. This position is almost an invitation to decide for oneself- the value of any one phase- and the rest will take their places automatically.

One may well ask why there is apparent indecisiveness in fixing the value of something so fundamental in holding together every musical manifestation. In brief, the

answer could be stated thus: in order to initiate a creative effort, the principle of individual freedom is brought into operation. However, the moment one moves further, it is subjected to neatly codified conventions, etc. In other words, for self-expression, one is allowed to set the tempo, but a desire to communicate with others or to create as art immediately sets limits on individual freedom in the interest of social or cultural exchange. The simple dictum is: you may change the tempo, but this desire must be moderated by the ultimate ideal of human exchange. The crux of the matter is that, time, as one of the ruling dimensions of life, brings into circulation a utility groove that is explored and exploited by the cultural group. If the tempo change desired by an individual is capable of maintaining a reasonable balance of 'similarity-difference' with the socially acceptable tempo, then the individual's choice is given a hearing. He is, as it were, put on trial. If the individual's perception and application of tempo answers the generally felt need for a tempo change, then he stands a chance of being hailed as an artist, creator, etc. In fact, he may then be praised for finding a new rhythm for the entire culture. In his context, the truth is rather paradoxical: To create rhythm, a change in tempo is essential, but every change in tempo cannot aspire to be a rhythm. This is why introduction of a new tempo can be both easy and frequent, but to take the next qualitative step always proves difficult. All societies are wary of tempo changes because of the omnipresent element of tempo in our life areas. There is bound to be a clash of interests if two versions of a tempo are vying for attention. There again, Plato was prophetic. He emphatically stated in *Republic*: 'Never allow rhythms in your State to change, because that spells anarchy in the State.'

It should, therefore, be obvious that change in tempo is a serious matter that has deep social implications. A new tempo brings in new divisions of time. It represents a new segmentation of life and a subsequent emergence of new life patterns. Pattern speaks of intricate interrelationship of all strands of the life fabric. Patterns, both of pleasure and pain, are nothing if not pervasive. They cannot be highly or firmly localised. Accepted patterns always tend to spread to areas adjacent to the areas of their origin. (However, Patterns in different life areas cannot be presumed to be governed by the principle of correspondence alone.)

Are we today opting for new tempos because of the felt need of rhythms? Is the well-realised circularity of the Indian tala proving irksome to our psyche? Are we pining for more collective, broad and compulsive tempos and rhythms, which make no demands on mental alertness and skill to perceive sophisticated avatars of temporal patterning? Is it not interesting to note that a majority of new manifestations of fusion music directly rely on tempos and rhythms employed in musical categories earlier

identified as primitive, religious and folk! Are not these categories known for their capacity to bind together bodies and minds into collective wholes?

Language

This brings us to the third component, words/language. How are they being employed? For what purpose? Words/language are sounds as well as meaningful units. When music makers focus on sound as sound, one kind of song is made. The story is different when meaningfulness is the motivating spirit. Music in India sings in multiple voices in this context. On the one hand, bhajans and ghazals have gained a new-found popularity – and they are easily recognisable examples of a meaningful use of words and language. On the other hand, the popular category of music registers a new high in using words and language as clusters of sounds, which may provide a basis for an endless manipulation. What does the notable popular reception to instrumental music in the art category suggest? Are we not indicating a preference for sound as sound? The current overt reliance on sound amplification, the desire for sophisticated techniques of employing public address systems, concern for good acoustics and such other features point to the fact that we are intent on utilising a dimension of musical sound that so far mostly remained on the periphery of our musical sensibilities.

Craving for New Timbres

I want to suggest that today there is an unconscious shift, in favour of the dimension of timbre as contrasted with pitch and volume. Popularity of instrumental renderings, vocalists' concern for amplification and such other effects in art music, the high-profile projection of certain language-backed genres, and the enthusiastic employment of novel instrumental resources in popular music are logical side effects of the present intense craving for new timbres (a fact that Indian musical cultures have been trying to bring to our notice at least from the beginning of the 19th century!). It is a known ethnomusicological feature that instrumental sounds are, culturally and emotionally, more neutral than the vocal. This is the reason why they migrate easily, repeatedly and extensively. The present situation is only an added proof of this phenomenon, which enjoys a long recorded history in India. Organology, the science of musical instruments, combined with a purposeful reading of music history as the history of performing ideas, reveals how instruments trace a career as music-making agents, as well as objects of interest. The manner in which new musical instruments

hold sway, or the way in which old ones find new uses, are items worthy of more analytical study. Such investigations are likely to bring into relief instrumental symbolism, operating at unimagined levels. For example, the increasing frequency of women taking to drums and to sushira or wind instruments would suggest a changing of sexual symbolism in music. These changes are not confined to instrumental music alone. More and more male musicians are making a kind of music that was conventionally associated with females and vice-versa.

Visual Music

The last overall change in Indian music making is simply put: earlier, musicians' appeal was, 'Listen to me.' Now this is preceded, if not replaced, by a forceful plea: 'Look at me. To develop an appeal for the eye has become a primary concern. I have always maintained that Indian manifestations are overwhelmingly multi-sensory. Therefore, grouping of arts, formation of art families, aesthetic theories about art mediums and their use, etc. have flowed in streams different from the ones in many non-Indian traditions. Any yet the contemporary appeal to the eye is qualitatively different. It seems to believe that more artistic information—as distinct from aesthetic significance—can be conveyed via the visual. In my opinion, the situation has been complicated because information has also been regarded to be the main agent influencing the act of making the judgement of taste'-so vital in aesthetic behaviour. This has resulted in a considerable clogging of information channels, as also in a marked reduction of emphasis on conveying artistic insights. Transmission of significances has taken a back seat in art activity, and more and more information is pumped in the music-making process—with unfortunate consequences.

Finally, to draw the strings together, what could symbolise the contemporary attitude of those engaged in music making? Perhaps it would both be appropriate and picturesque to say that where bhramara's gunjarava once reigned supreme, chitrapatanga's flitting fanciful flights have become the cynosure of our eyes!

The description may appear to lean a little on the negative side. That is not the intention. The eye-ear changing interrelationship is only a part of the story unfolding before us. Our sensory profile is undergoing a transformation as a whole. And as we are aware, senses in action are not five but thirteen, and thus the profile becomes a challenging spectrum of possibilities. To explore it we need some time, and more than that, a will. As has been said, most of the battles are won in the mind. A period of 50 years is less than a moment for a nation's march in time. Let us not stretch

the purusha concept to the extent of equating a nation's career with the human lifespan. The pace of the cultural action is more than what we are used to, but it is not unnatural. I believe that the quality of our perception is changing and all our theories of art and culture will need hard and careful rethinking. We can use this occasion to take a step in that direction.

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