The Necessity of Aesthetics: Music

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Introduction

What is the immediate provocation for taking up a theme which has been nearly stated as an assumption?

One reason is that the theme refers to a fundamental issue and such issues need to be discussed afresh by every generation for itself. Secondly it appears that due to the changes in music as well as aesthetics in the adjacent past it has created a demand for a reconsideration of many terms, concepts and theories related to conception, propagation, reception, communication and evaluation of musical endeavour and behaviour of all over the world. Thirdly, as is to be expected music behaviour has moved ahead in the performing aspect while scholastic statements about theoretical frameworks embedded in the endeavour have not kept pace with the developments. The time lag between practice or Performance of music and exposition of the inherent theories has become noticeably large and it is time to correct the imbalance. Theoretical expositions including those about the evaluation of any life-event are conducing to betterment of the societal life. This may lead to the desirable harmonizing between the essentially critical activities on the one hand the accompanying creative efforts.

It is on this background that the contemporary musical scene needs to be examined afresh and decision is taken to obtain an evaluative framework accommodative enough to do justice to it. In this direction the first inevitable step is to recognize the existence, inevitability and legitimacy of the categorial sextet of Indian music (in its totality).

Categories of Music

No society or cultural group is homogenous and whatever social stratification it displays is real - in spite of the expected and inevitable overlaps. More often than not, each of the socio-cultural strata is specifically associated with a particular kind of music.

This innate association between socio-cultural strata and particular musical expression is one of the major factors responsible for origin of musical categories.

However, one feature of this process is noteworthy. This music - with its identifiable socio-cultural linkage - is a component of the totality of performing culture and it tends to mirror/reflect the stratification only after transforming it in musical terms. As a consequence, during the process, music seeks to symbolize cultural strata. Thus, what is essentially and initially identified as a body of socio-cultural facts clearly stands out as a structure of patterns of musico-aesthetic experience parallel to socio-cultural reality. This is the reason why categories exist as fundamental moulds of experience - for persons as members of a society and for societies understood as collective bodies of individuals.

It is therefore inadequate to explain categories as mere results of 'music associated with strata', or as 'outcome of efforts of individuals originating in, of belonging to' specific social strata. In other words, music categories are not and cannot be understood or explained as 'producer-oriented' phenomena. Attempts to establish or look for a firm linkage of musical categories with social, sub-cultural expression and/or with individual originators hailing from 'lower' classes etc. fail to reveal musical make-up and cultural significance of categories.

Advocates of sub-culture studies agree on existence of musical categories but they view them as expression of sub-groups so designated by the 'elite' or 'high' class within the concerned society. Further, they also view the act of categorial differentiation as a part of the elite strategies of self-empowerment, cultural politics or deliberate/unconscious manipulation of social authority, etc.

Alan Lomax, the pioneering ethnomusicologist and the main formulator of the challenging theoretical formulation which is described as cantometrics, has also put forward an interesting argument about the 'favoured song style' hypothesis. Arguing that from the repertory of several musical components of a society, individual social segments may choose to focus on one, and thus each stratum may have a different or distinct music of its own. This will be the music to which the stratum owes its primary allegiance. However, despite differences resulting from selective musical emphases there exists one favoured song style for a music-culture that symbolizes for the society the musical unity of the entire culture. A question may be raised: does the hypothesis of favoured song style contradict categories of music as separate musical streams?

Two views seem to emerge. One view is that folk music or art music of a music-culture symbolizes the common, shared and exceptional musical profile of a

society unique to a particular culture. The favoured song style of a culture is to be found in either of these categories – as the fundamental musical stratum of a society is formed by one of these categories. It appears that to make either of these categories acceptable repositories of music-traits adequate to stand for, represent a particular society the chosen category will have to be widely defined. For example, Wiora arguing in favor of folk music as the representative music has noted, "Not all folkish music which is non-professional (and) easily understood is to be called folk music in the true sense. Rather this term is used only for that which is properly the culture of the folk. And by folk we mean not only the totality of the basic strata of society such as peasants, herdsman, miners, folk musicians etc. but also that which is truly and generally valid for an entire society" (Wiora, 1957, pp. 22).

The other view is that the favoured song style of a culture is in the final analysis discernible only after the total musical expression or culture of a society is examined. Hence the song style by definition would be shared by all categories of music.

In my opinion, in India, with its complex caste-system operating on numerous fronts, music categories succeed in transcending their sub-cultural functions and as a result they stake claims for qualitative examination and assessment. Of course, these musics continue to have their ethnomusicological contexts and meanings - but at the most this constitutes merely a part of the story.

In a somewhat paradoxical manner, musical categories in India reflect socio-cultural concerns, they go on to reveal and explore layers of individual minds and yet transcend these to set up immensely varied and often quality-oriented musical structures enveloping life of the entire community.

It is at this point that a brief discussion about the concept of categories of Indian music is likely to be helpful.

Musical categories: India – Preliminary remarks

As an illustrative study of the phenomenon of total music I propose to discuss six categories of music in India. Some preliminary remarks about categories are in order.

1. Even though I explain the categories with reference to music, I have reasonable grounds to assume their validity in all major 'cultural' expression in India.

2. Categories are fundamental moulds of creation, propagation and reception of experience as also of human expression.

3. It is important to note that categories are not producer oriented.

4. All categories change but they vary in their amenability to, and rate of change.

5. Indian categories of music exemplify pervasive functioning of a comprehensive oral tradition. However, it cannot be described as a tradition of preliterate groups.

6. It is not suggested that all categories exist in all culture all the time and everywhere. However, the greater the number of categories existing in a culture, greater the likelihood of a richer and complex culture. Generally speaking, the more the number of categories that operates within a culture - greater would be the musical richness of the culture in terms of variety of genres, number of performers involved and socio-cultural energy spent in performances.

7. To a lesser or greater extent, the categorial sextet mentioned earlier exhibits simultaneous operations though their proportions may vary. In other words, their presence or absence does not refer to more or less evolved state of societies/groups concerned. Expectably, different regions of India display varying dynamics of musical behavior. The fact is reflected clearly in existence, perception and functioning of categories.

8. Both intra-category and inter-category circulation of musical ideas is a highly unpredictable feature. Among other factors, it depends on many socio-cultural processes including media-operation, structuring of political power as also the measure and quality of social organization.

9. Categories do not function in isolation, or exist as watertight compartments. Interaction, mutual influencing and interpenetration are normal and unmistakable processes related to them. This is inevitable as categories are streams of a living and a larger, culture.

10. As is apparent from the terms used to identify them, categories are not and cannot be differentiated through identical criteria. It is so basically because conceptual contents of individual categories display varied orientation. For example, the term Primitive exhibits ethnological bias while the term 'Folk' emerges from folklore - a new discipline which owes its circulation to intellectual churnings of the last century. Art and 'Classical' (-unfortunately regarded synonymous-) are terms that are a result of philosophical attempts to establish a hierarchy for assessing particular 'value-

experience's generally known as 'art'. The concept and the term Popular are linked to cybernetics and related operations of mass media. The term 'Religious' hardly appears to be a technical term! Finally, the term Confluence indicates dynamic aspect of culture which is trying to assimilate something that appears new, unfamiliar but inviting - at least for the time being! The point is that these terms are not neatly defined with some purpose. It is left to their actual use, contextual weight and capacity to 'fit or contain' the concerned experience to bring home their meaning, import etc.!

11. As the categories are a part of a living culture, they are not watertight compartments. However, overlaps between them do not mean that any one category can be mistaken for the other.

12. As it would become clear during discussions related to specific instances, there is a case to be made for 'marginal' or 'border line' manifestations in some performances or presentations or forms/genres in some categories. It is a usual experience that with a little modification or deviation, some forms etc. would change their declared or generally accepted category.

13. There is no intrinsic greatness attached to any of the categories. All are equally legitimate as human manifestations. All categories enjoy equal sociological validity, musicological legitimacy and capacity of being culturally expressive. To say this is of course is not to shun responsibility of judging them - either ethically or aesthetically!

14. Nobody performs categories per se! Genres subsumed under categories, and compositions generated within genres are the entities that are actually performed. Therefore, the chain that makes categories concrete to perceivers is: category > genre > composition and finally performance. Obviously, the progression suggests a movement from wider to narrower contexts, change in criteria or their sets employed to evaluate the content. Finally. the chain also points to emergence - however gradual - of the performer-performance-perceiver trinity as constituents of a wider process of communication.

15. Most of the categories will have two kinds of identifiable features: Cultural and musical. Even though they may not be direct, one to one and causal relation between the two - they reflect each other and also reflect on one another!

16. With some hesitation I would suggest that legitimacy of categories is a result of the fact that the basic human personality appears to have corresponding layers. This is the secret of the categorial appeal to us - irrespective of our conscious understanding of them.

This is the background on which Indian categorial scene in music in general is to be appreciated. I briefly note below the chief features of music in each category to help us in taking the argument further.

Primitive music

1. Composite (DDM)

2. Response to three cycles.

3. Music for everybody, everything & for every occasion - Eternal give and take.

4. Song important than music. Song defined differently (endless, song cycles)

5. Ritualistic charge even without a real ritual

6. Audience-role of participation

7. Song addresses 'outside' agency/power

8. More reliance on rhythm than on melody

9. Accent on 'non-sweet' melodies. One of the structural and musical principle is the accent on contrasts and broad effects. High and low notes, mood of excitement and repose, slow and fast tempi etc. are liberally detected.

10. Language - literature less important

11. Collective composing

12. Pervasive symbolism

13. Uncommon or multipurpose instruments

14. Scope for tactile – richer sensory palette.

Folk Music

1. Less instrumental music (instruments less independent)

2. Collectivity in creation - propagation and reception

3. Collectivity in content (emotional etc.)

4. Oral tradition and folk music: a) continuous creation, b) song-sets carried forward, c) special techniques of composition

5. Multiple motivation: a) personal b) societal: They often enact power-relations c) religious d) linguistic-literary e) regional f) functional

6. Negation/denial of chronological placement

7. Variable changeability: a) conservation, b) adaptability

8. Special relation to art music

9. Folk song

Popular Music

1. Universality (time and space dimensions)

2. Middle class influence

3. Leisure hour product – recreation

4. Mass media role

5. Demographic redistribution - a cause

6. Patronage change - LCM in receptivity

7. Supply-demand time-lag minimum

8. Industry mechanism takes over

9. Satisfaction of obvious demands

10. Functionality, fashion

11. Concept of musical progress? Spiral?

The Category of Popular Music: Chief Features

Types/Kinds/Genres - It is perhaps necessary to enumerate, however perfunctorily. Some prominent forms in which popular music expresses itself. Following would easily come to mind:

1. Film songs and background music

2. Broadcast music - especially jingles etc.

3. Signature tunes

4. Telecast advertisement-music and signature tunes

5. Songs composed for recorded versions

6. Political slogans, songs - especially for election campaigns etc.

7. Melodic motor horns, door bells, telephone-music etc.

8. Stadium songs in sports meets, festivals, competitions etc.

9. Version-songs, remixes based on old or existing songs, Indie Pop, some compositions in Fusion Music, Indian rap, DJ products, etc.

10. Songs

The list is not exhaustive and it is only intended to give an idea of the musical variety in the category as also of its diverse functions - musical as well as non-musical.

Art Music

1. Aesthetic intention

2. Existence of scholastic and performing traditions

3. Less of a package character

4. Soloist allowed scope

5. Genre arrays chiefly based on patterning of musical parameters including technical competence

6. Structured teaching/learning process

7. Audiences and their roles more defined and audiences are required to be comparatively 'passive'

8. Joining with other arts

9. Abstraction to the maximum

Religious Music

1. All religions tend to have music.

2. Religious music is basically of three main types: a) liturgical music, b) devotional music, c) mystic music

3. It facilitates rituals.

4. It reinforces mythology.

5. It helps retention and digestion of intellectual content of religion.

6. It underscores hierarchies in the institutionalized structure that every religion is.

7. It creates intense, non-classifiable and essentially non-mundane liberating emotional experience.

8. Especially in the Devotional category, role creation proves conducive to variety in each aspects of music such as: genre, melody, rhythm, modes of presentation

9. Most of religious music tends to be composite in character. This has two main effects: it appeals to many strata of the society and also to many senses at the same time.

10. It brings about social cohesion because collectivity has an important place in religious manifestations.

What is Confluence?

      The term 'confluence' is unambiguously derived from the classical - 'con + fluere'. There are three main shades to the meaning of the term and all are relevant in the context of the concept under discussion. It is therefore useful to note them: a) wing together of two or more streams, rivers or the likes b) Their place of junction c) A coming together of people or things concourse.

Fusion and Confluence – Difference

However, it is possible and perhaps desirable to make a conceptual distinction at this stage of the inquiry. Fusion is a musical strategy to dissociate musical units from multiple musical traditions from their respective parent traditions to make new combinations. To that extent, the original traditions 'melt away' or disintegrate to arrive at a new musical profile. On the other hand, Confluence Music transcends this stage to acquire a new identity. Like the nuclear fission it creates new energy through breaking musical units away from their musical matrices. Therefore, fusion - like imitation, improvisation or deviation is a strategy which, by definition, may not yield genuinely creative results. Fusion is better understood essentially as an act of blending or uniting of multiple styles in which the original musical styles or units may lose their special identity but may not guarantee artistic success of what emerges. It may just be 'new'! Aptly Indian terms would be ekikarana, ekibhavana, vilayana, vilayikarana. On the other hand, the process of fission, though it may bring about a splitting or cleaving away of originally homogenous units into parts- may prove to be a precursor to release of a new and considerable energy. Indian terms to express the concept may be *urja-utsarga*, *vikhandana*. As historians have pointed out Tyagaraja, the most revered composer of the nineteenth century in the Carnatic system of art music in India compose a Kriti Vanalila to the British marching music - but this can hardly be called Confluence Music. It may however be counted as an early example of Fusion!

Expectably, Confluence Music is ultimately an outcome of cultural assimilation as briefly described. Enumeration of the chief characteristics of Confluence Music would generate a musical profile and it will also explain some operative details of the strategy of Assimilation.

Fusion > Fission > Confluence

Confluence Music: Chief Characteristics

1. Confluence Music represents an attempt at bringing together two or more musical cultures that otherwise lead an effective existence irrespective of one another.

2. In its essence it differs from musical phenomenon described as Experimental, Contemporary or Modern etc. mainly because the cross cultural musical interpenetration of musical forces Confluence proclaims may often point to voices from the hoary past or very early ages of musical history.

3. Conceptually examined, this music is likely to register deviations - practically from every musical tradition it refers to. Consequently, such music may arouse complaints about loss of authenticity, purity, distortion of cultural ideals etc. from every quarter! It may satisfy none - but its practitioners!

4. It may originate in ideas, movements, ideologies that are not directly related to music.

5. Confluence music may seek to combine music from non-corresponding categories. For example, art music from one culture may be combined with religious or folk music from the other participating culture or vice versa.

6. For its proper evaluation this music may require a new set of evaluative criteria to do justice to its peculiar structures.

7. Generally speaking this music will exhibit a prominent use of new timbre – though other musical aspects such as melodic, rhythmic and linguistic are not entirely neglected.

8. Even though new timbres are possible in vocal as well as instrumental resources in music, reliance on new instrumental timbres will be abundant as well as more varied than recourse to vocal sounds. Having introduced new vocal/instrumental timbres, the category will be seen to valiantly tackle the problem of balancing vocal and instrumental streams in every possible way.

9. Melodic and linguistic sources may be sought to be combined earlier than rhythmic in multicultural musical creations in category.

10. In each musical category such as art, folk, religious, new creations inevitably take place within the context provided by the existing array of genres. This is so because categories are stabilized cultural moulds relying on consolidated frameworks provided by genres. However, in Confluence music compositions would take place on a genre map in which lines dividing genres are blurred. In fact, creation takes place as a composition which may or may not fit into an existing genre.

11. In fact, it may be maintained that from the six categories, Popular music and Confluence music are the two which evince the least stabilized state of music-making.

12. Confluence music may often be recognized as Confluence music - only post facto - i.e., only after operations of hindsight have taken place!

Conclusion

It should be obvious that even a brief enumeration of chief features of Indian music in its totality raises questions about the validity of the current trend to confine discussion of aesthetics mostly or largely to art or classical music. This narrowing down of musical creativity and experience hardly seems justified. We have to considerably expand the conceptual map, theoretical framework and the scope of the hierarchy of the evaluative criteria if the performing and the scholastic realities in music are to coexist harmoniously to ensure enriched cultural life and understanding of the country.