



Music and Drama

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Chapter 01

SELF-EXPRESSION, COMMUNICATION AND ARTS

Human beings are distinguished by their intense urge to reach beyond self-expression, a shibboleth of modern men in search of art. However, it is instructive to note that the term self-expression as understood today was first used very late in 1892!¹ The term has since gained currency, obviously as a result of the Romantic movements which extolled the individual as distinct from society. And yet 'the plume-less genus of bipeds' (as Plato described the homo sapiens) and in fact all sentiments have felt the need to communicate with others of the same (or even of different) species prior to the desire for self-expression. It is not surprising that as connoting 'an act of sharing of ideas, information with others', the term 'communicate' found its first use as early as in 1526!² This stands to reason because communication in its primary function is the totality of social interaction through messages, clearly a process basic to the very existence of human groups. The two processes of self-expression and communication are, of course, not mutually exclusive but they nevertheless tend to be more or less predominant according to the occasion, ambience and aim. Arts came into reckoning as arts because they are to achieve more and differently than both self-expression and communication. This is also the consideration which makes arts combine or separate, partially or entirely, in different historical periods in various cultures.

I submit that a further refinement and a little simplification blesses us with a conceptual triad each member of which is related to a specific kind of function and thereby to a particular discipline. We have self-expression as an individual activity responsible for the primitive functions of all languages. This is logically followed by communication which is social in essence and multi-channelled in exploration. Finally we have effective expression (which includes self-expression and communication) as art with aesthetics as a thought-field devoted to it. Self-expression, thus understood, would impress as a deliberate, directed and an efficient activity. On the other hand art would emerge as an artificial, highly co-ordinated and impact-oriented human exercise.

¹ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, G.W.S. Friedrichsen, Third Edition, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985, p. 1934.

² Ibid., p. 379.

It is significant that etymologically the word expression is explained as ‘ex=out’ and ‘press’. The etymological core of the term ‘communication’ refers to ‘something held in common, something shared’. Finally in its original thrust the term ‘art’ meant ‘an act of putting together, joining or fitting’. The term obviously gave noticeable weightage to techniques and skills involved in putting together diverse elements. Expectedly the artistic connotation of the term ‘art’ has come on the scene as late as 1668!³ In other words the ancient Upanishadic human declaration एकोऽहम् बहु स्याम्-I am one, I will be many—suggests a contact-continuum which is however understood to have three isolable phases of self-expression, communication and art. Elmer Rice attempts a similar distinction between the processes of communication and creation. He points out that the former is an organized industrial or technological process while the latter is a spontaneous and a self-initiated activity of an individual.⁴ An individual’s out pourings in response (and not as reaction) to a stimulus-situation are to be differentiated from his voluntary efforts to establish close contacts with receiver-participants in stimulus-situations. A further step brings to notice those movements and moments in which quality and value of experience are the chief concern of both originators and receivers of the activity. The entry of the quality or the value aspect transforms the entire situation radically because the qualitative/valuational affords great scope to the giver's sensibilities, receiver's sensitivities as well as to the variety, depth and frequency of the stimuli and the related responses. The later the phase on the (self-expression-communication-art) continuum, the more the number of earlier phases it accommodates in itself. Art therefore includes communication which in its turn incorporates self-expression. The conceptual *matushka*, if and when denied its legitimate place in the scheme of thought-structure, invariably provokes thinkers-artists-aestheticians to protest in the name of one or more members of the triad. Many of the isms or schools, manifestos, movements or *morchas* are outcomes of very human natural efforts to apply correctives to processes perceived as aberrations and not mere deviations from the chain noted.

Against this background is to be examined a cultural occurrence of unique fascination—the coming together of two arts pursued with unabated vigour and persistence in human history. The arts in action are music and drama.

³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴ Elmer Rice, *The Living Theatre*, Harper and Bros., New York, 1959, p. 2.

Why the Inquiry?

Perhaps a few observations are in order to bring home the necessity of studying the inter-relationship of music and drama.

The totality of the contemporary artistic behaviour is broadly classifiable in four divisions: literary, fine, performing and the composite. The four-fold classification has the salutary effect of discouraging formulation of monolithic theories in general aesthetics. Admittedly all arts might share some features in common. Yet the four-fold classification reflects a realization that particular art-groups share definite/ specific conceptual, experiential and presentational problems more closely than some others and therefore an all-encompassing aesthetic umbrella becomes a near impossibility. Two remarkable consequences flowing from this position have been noted. Firstly, a multiple criteria method has won recognition as a powerful tool of aesthetic inquiry. Secondly, individual arts are now accorded a reasonable autonomy. Of immediate relevance is the fact that dance, drama and music naturally form into a cluster and hence constitute an art-family. These arts share important concerns, display common features and throw up identical evaluative criteria. This is the reason why a study of their inter-relationship proves beneficial to both performers and their partners in evaluation, i.e. critics, etc. To understand the inter-relationship enjoyed by music and drama better, is therefore to create and evaluate them more truthfully as well as fruitfully!

This aesthetic advantage is also of great contemporary relevance. Today, as never before in the history of arts, more and more art-expression is presented as a combination. For example mixed-media presentations have become a regular feature of modern life. Further, the tendency to impart education of arts through media-exposition (dependent on combinations of various arts) is noticeably on the increase. Under the circumstances a rigorous examination of inter-arts relationship becomes imperative. Music and drama are to be discussed in this perspective.

A special complicating factor, however, needs to be mentioned before proceeding further. Music and drama belong to the same family and musico-dramatic genres are, for various reasons, astounding in their multiplicity. It is therefore helpful to limit the scope of inquiry and make it slightly more manageable. One way of doing so is to define the nature of the inquiry undertaken.

Nature of the Inquiry

Musico-dramatic relationships can obviously be studied in a number of ways. For example, it is possible to adopt a historical perspective. Equally viable would be to adopt an area-study approach. Another engrossing procedure could be to concentrate either on the dramatic or the musical aspect. However the present study is characterized by an aesthetic orientation. To this end the major strategy would be to conceptualize the discussion. The overall aim is to focus attention on the quality of experience accruing from different kinds of musico-dramatic combinations. Observations offered by socio-political, historical, geographical examination are not outlawed but they are explored only to bring into relief the aesthetic consequences. It is admitted that non-art events and processes have aesthetic consequences. They are, therefore, required to be utilized as 'good' supporting material. It is in this sense that a pronounced endeavour to adopt a cultural perspective is considered appropriate. Today it has become apparent that cultural motivation leads to aesthetic choices. For example it is now better realized that the three performing arts do not and need not produce identical genres even though the fact of their coming together is nearly universal. Each performing culture may throw up its own combination genres, the only abstract common feature being the act of joining the musical and theatric forces. The Italian-German-French operas, American musicals, Viennese operetta, musical comedy, revue, vaudeville and the numerous Indian musico-theatric genres inevitably turn out to be considerably different in kind, content and presentation in spite of the existing/imaginary similarities. This is unavoidable because cultural hinterlands of musico-theatric genres differ and the fact is necessarily reflected in the final shape of the genres. Anticipating a little it could in fact be stated that the coming together of the performing trinity is not an 'arty' and superficial ripple! It is symptomatic of occurrences at deeper levels of the collective psyche.

Cultural orientation is rarely registered without a regional foundation which is, in most cases, accompanied by linguistic continuities. An inquiry which is expansive at the conceptual level consequently undergoes a narrowing-down process at the cultural level. This loss in comprehensiveness, however, means a gain as far as concrete application is considered. Arguments in the present inquiry would therefore seek frequent support from the musico-theatric achievements of Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali and Parsi theatres, they being the language traditions representative of the Indian scene. Later it will become clear that the four language-based traditions also represent four musico-dramatic *gharanas* to use the favourite term in the Indian performing arts.

Theatre and Drama

A clear distinction needs to be made at this point between theatre and drama as terms and crystallized experiences. The two can hardly be treated as interchangeable even though some of our usage might suggest mutual substitution. Theatre, however, is known to enjoy a conceptual and chronological priority over drama. The two are also different in quality. Even an illustrative list of theatric manifestations clarifies the point. For example, performances of magic, acrobatics, animal training, clowning, mimicry, disguising acts, snake-charming and the like can be easily enumerated. Theatre-principle is also detected in sacramental rites, festivals, ceremonial procedures and observances of protocol. In addition a number of martial arts would attract description as theatric. Needless to say such manifestations have a long history in India. Some theatre-thinkers have persuasively stated that these are the precursors of Indian drama.⁵

Drama, when compared to such theatric manifestations reveals a distinctive as well as narrower range. A close look at the experience of theatre and drama respectively should bear this out.

For example acrobats and their kin make us marvel at their skill and dexterity. Animal-training feats create a feeling of condescending admiration for the non-human performers and elicit praise for the tenacity and resourcefulness of the human trainers. Mimetic abilities in general seem to feed our craving for otherness and the performers in action gain approval for their discernible powers of close observation, adroitness and polished presentation. Rites and rituals (the latter can enjoy secular contexts also) unfailingly impress through their 'changed' quality and the intensity reaching to psychological depths otherwise inaccessible. Finally, ceremonial procedures or observances of protocol successfully set up an authority to look up to—it being the human admission of the need for an enveloping protective force. Therefore it is not logical to confuse the theatric and the dramatic. Theatre and drama are undoubtedly and generically connected but cannot be regarded identical. At this juncture it would be beneficial to compare and contrast the theatric with the dramatic.

⁵ Carl Georg Bohne, Sylvan Levi and other Indologists have persuasively argued that Indian terms usually held to be synonymous with the English term 'actor' indicate in reality theatric specializations existing during different periods of Indian theatric history. In this connection terms such as *shailoosh*, *nata*, *shailalin*, *krishnashwin*, *kushilava*, *vaitalik*, *charana*, *suta*, *magadha* and *vagjivana* etc. would come to mind.

Bohne in fact goes further and points out that taken together the terms bring out three major kinds of theatre persons in the early phase of Indian theatric history. They are: (a) Qualified, sophisticated persons as mentioned in the Sanskrit literary drama from Ashwaghosha (100 B.C.) to Kalidasa (500 A.D.); (b) Schooled amateurs evident in Brahmana-s (800 B.C.) to Manu (200 A.D.); (c) Strolling jugglers etc. of the post-Vedic to Maurya age. See Carl George Bohne, *Primitive Stage*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1971, p. 70–72.

Characteristics

1. Both are entirely performance-oriented and are made real only through an actual presentation. An imagined, visualized or a notional version (in respect of both of them) is comparable to a map while the enacted, performed item corresponds to the region itself! In the context of the present discussion the following definition of performance is relevant: Performance is a physical manifestation of the intent to concretize a coordinated, predetermined, psycho-physical and action-oriented design. This emerging design is a direct result of impulses consciously channelized to explore choric, choreographic and histrionic human acts which may or may not be aided by other agencies. The design assumes finality only after the audience has made its contribution according to the relevant norms established by the culture under consideration. The original design frequently undergoes substantial and qualitative changes on account of audience participation.
2. The two manifestations allow audiences to function as a shaping agent of their respective final forms. Audience participation, and not mere presence, is valued. The participation may turn out to be more articulate in theatre than in the dramatic presentations. Different cultures evolve their own norms and conventions to govern the nature and proportion of audience contribution.
3. Generally both are characterized by a discernible impact-orientation. It is not enough that a presentation is made. It must produce an immediate impact. An impact can be broadly described as a demonstrated response which leaves no or little gap between stimulus and its reception. Compared to the dramatic, the theatric elicits more body-action from the audience while achieving the impact. In other words an impact is much more and/ or different than an effect or an act of reaching the audience. This is the reason why devices such as exaggeration, framing, accentuation and the like are employed.
4. Ritualism appears at various levels and in varied proportions in both. However in theatric manifestations it is more likely to be tinged by sacred or religious elements than the secular. A pervading, psycho-physical and charged behaviour is noticeable.
5. Theatre and drama are distinguished among other characteristics by their compositeness. A close scrutiny reveals theatre to have less number of aspects than a dramatic presentation. It is essential to remember that compositeness is not an automatic result of a chance coming together of 'differents'. Compositeness cannot be created by 'joining/combining', 'mixing' or 'fusing' of multiple presentation-formats, etc. The connotation of the term composite requires to be properly understood.

Bharata and Compositeness

According to Bharata the four aspects of the *pathya* (to be recited), *gayana* (singing), *vidhi* (rite, ceremony) and *rasa* (sentiment) are borrowed from the Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva vedas respectively to create the composite character.

A close look at the quartet reveals that the first three elements are ‘structural’-originating respectively from literary, musical and choreographic or mimetic arts. The fourth element impresses by its psychological thrust with the magico-ritualistic Atharvaveda as its source. It is significant that the parallelogram of the forces is completed through the impact-oriented Atharva which obviously contributes something undefinable and non-verbalized. In other words two turns are required to be completed before a coming together of arts is set apart as composite. Firstly, the arts that come together should belong to different families of arts. Secondly, a significant role should be allotted to ‘impact’ even though it is difficult to define and verbalize the contribution it makes to the ultimate design.

The conceptual progress of the *rasa* aspect in the thought process traced here requires careful examination. *Natyashastra*, the authoritative and a first-generation exposition, is seen to execute a fundamental manoeuvre primarily by narrowing down the theatric into dramatic. This is achieved when the first three borrowings result into the three aspects of *pathya*, *gayana* and *vidhi*. Of equal importance is the introduction of the new, unspecified and the fourth aspect of *rasa*, a magico-ritualistic performance feature that nearly adds a new dimension to the whole enterprise. The adroit move makes room for the compositeness which achieves the aim of moving away from the grosser combinations inherent in the theatric and yet successfully retains the fundamental, undefinable ‘felt’ quality of impact. It needs to be stressed that the concept of *rasa* was originally and essentially brought in to secure a rightful place for the non-specific, the ambiguous and the nonverbal element of impact in the composite art form of drama differentiated both from theatre and the literary arts. Regrettably a majority of later discussions of the *rasa* concept continued to revolve round literary arts and the original impulse provided by the performing arts (which initially necessitated the entry of *rasa* in the aesthetic arena) has been overlooked.

During the course of history the radii of circles of applicability (of the *rasa* concept) have expanded considerably. The very act of bringing together different arts has also undergone changes to keep pace with these conceptual expansions. For all practical purposes this has been and will be a continuous process. Evolution of various genres and/or their dominance/decline is to be attributed to the myriad compulsions that separate/combine different arts.

Therefore the often heard nostalgic references to the ‘once-together and now-separated avatars’ of drama, dance and music are hardly justified aesthetically. Firstly, because the togetherness was evident in the theatre phase on a qualitatively indifferent plane and not invariably so in the play i.e. *natak* phase. *Natak* was and is a variety of *natya* which in its turn is a less accommodative manifestation of theatre to which it is generically related. All (or most of) the performing arts in India came together in theatre. However in the drama and play phases there is a perceptible narrowing down. As a consequence the varying scope allowed to dance and music in performance provides a major criterion to evolve a useful theatric typology. The hierarchy of theatric forms would rely a great deal for its definition on the latitude enjoyed by the four aspects Bharata has mentioned. From the four, *rasa* appears to be a constant and the other three bring in the variable element. The infinite variety in composite expressions proves less confusing if the changeable roles of music and dance are borne in mind.

6. Improvisation assumes importance both in theatre and drama. Music and dance, the two other arts in the performing triad, also provide abundant instances of improvisation. However improvisation operates in a special way in theatre. A brief explanation might prove helpful.

Improvisation could be described as a spontaneous projection of content and the exploration in expressive channels both made to deviate from their original conception (for a performance). In addition, the projections and explorations invariably consist of last-minute alterations intended to improve the entire presentation qualitatively. Theatric and dramatic improvisations acquire their special character because these alterations are brought about through an exchange of functions among the four aspects mentioned by Bharata. Briefly stated the strategy consists of substitution, compensation and manipulation of intensities of the four *abhinayas*. As could be expected the exchange of functions has a narrower range in theatre (as contrasted with the drama phase) because the four aspects are hardly differentiated in it.

7. Theatre can be distinguished from drama in spite of the often ‘helpless’ use of the terms theatre and drama as interchangeable because drama is actualized through *abhinaya*. For purposes of the present discussion *abhinaya* is to be defined as a continuous process of reaching auditors via a deliberate projection of essentially evanescent (and therefore ever-changing) series of perceptual designs formulated through a systematic exploration of the four aspects expounded by Bharata. In other words *abhinaya* is a multi-channelled activity reaching the audience. *Abhinaya*, according to Bharata, is of four types. It is interesting to note that the four *abhinaya* types display an intrinsic relationship with the four aspects responsible for the compositeness. It is instructive to note the logical structure which emerges through a juxtaposition of the two quartets.

Aspect (contributing to the composite character)	Type of <i>abhinaya</i> (traceable to the aspect borrowed)
pathya	vachika
gayana	?
vidhi	angika
rasa	satvika
?	aharya

Correspondences emerging through the arrangement are easily perceivable and convincing. However, one feature is immediately noticed. Of the four constituents, *gayana* has no corresponding *abhinaya* type and of the four *abhinaya* types the *aharya* does not have a constituent aspect to pair with it in the composite framework. What is to be deducted? Does it mean that *abhinaya* was not deemed to be communicable through singing and that the *aharya* was not considered to have an intrinsic relationship with the compositeness? It may be that these positions influenced the Indian musico-theatric traditions of the later periods. The questions are noted at this juncture to be taken up after a wider conceptual ground is covered.

Perhaps it is not realized that in comparison to Bharata's comprehensive definition of *abhinaya* the modern understanding of the phenomenon indicates a considerable diminution in force and scope. In the contemporary usage *abhinaya* is equated with acting and in the process gets restricted to non-verbal and non-linguistic expression chiefly consisting of the ocular, facial and hand-body movements. And yet the contemporary theoreticians do not seem to have spent much effort on the study and systematization of the non-verbal and the non-linguistic. In comparison, Bharata's acute and thorough codification is bewildering as well as dazzling. To that extent Bharata's theatric vision is more complete.

The prevailing situation thus seems somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand Bharata's definition of *abhinaya* has been reduced to mean what the modern actors prefer to call 'business'. On the other hand the present-day non-verbal (in spite of noticeable stylization) has not been as thoroughly systematized as in the *Natyashastra*. It is not surprising that in its historical march the term 'acting' came to mean the performance of plays, stimulation' only by 1664.⁶ A majority of technical entries on 'acting' seem to describe it in terms of what actors do or initiate on stage during performances. 'Business' as a part of 'acting' is not commonly accepted as a technical term though Webster's New World Dictionary explains it as an 'action in a drama, esp. for a particular effect, to

⁶ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. 1, p. 20.

take up a pause in dialogue, etc.’⁷ In this context two pithy observations are recorded here in translation:

abhinaya is carrying out a ‘business’ to join the spaces between two sentences.

Keshavrao Date⁸

The evolved and the artificial version of natural gestures is *abhinaya*.

Itihasacharya Rajwade⁹

8. A theoretical observation about the nature of the stage-play (usually referred to as drama) can be made at this point. The dramatic as a phenomenon stands between theatre and literature. From the theatre end it is influenced by the non-verbal as well as the pronounced physical and expressive elements while from the other extreme it is attracted by the linguistic which often touches literary levels. Different dramatic genres owe their distinguishable formal identities to (their) placement on the non-verbal-literary axis. In this sense the dramatic always exhibits a tilt towards either of the two extremes.

It seems inevitable to conclude that the Indian theatric theory suffered seriously because it concentrated on poetry as the dominant form of aesthetic experience. A reference to a wider field of aesthetic experience would certainly have served its ends better. Indian theoreticians have been known for their categorisation of theatric presentations as ‘seen poetry’, i.e. *drishya kavya*. Performers clearly felt the inadequacy of the definition and hence repeatedly used terms such as *shravya kavya* (heard poetry) and in the recent past referred to *pathya kavya* (read/recited poetry).¹⁰ However the persistent suffixing of terms with ‘*kavya*’ indicates the prestige attained by the *kavya* modality in the eyes of the theoreticians. To canonize dramaturgy as the fifth *veda* or to categorise drama as a variety of *kavya* is to enhance the respective prestiges of dramaturgy/drama by providing them a sanction of modalities already accepted and revered. I suggest that such endeavours should not be treated as serious indicators of the intrinsic, sufficient and necessary conditions of the theatric or the dramatic. Because *Vedas* are mentioned one need not rush to assert the sacred/religious character of the Indian impulse! Similarly a reference to *kavya* should not compel us to interpret the theatric/dramatic through literary eyes! In order to analyse the nature of the fundamental principles of the theatric/dramatic the legitimacy of the diverse motivation of the individual genres must be recognized. Secondly, an analysis of the structural individualism of the genres

⁷ Edited by David B. Guralnik, Amerind Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1972, p. 192.

⁸ V.V. Jog, ed., Natashreshtha Keshadrao Date, Parchure Prakashan, Bombay, 1976, p. 89.

⁹ ‘Vichar-Vikar Pradarshanachya Sadhananchi Utkranti’, quoted in *Rajwade Lekhsangraha*, edited by Laxmanshastri Joshi, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1958, p. 14.

¹⁰ K. Narayan Kale, *Natyavimarsha*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1961, pp. 47-49.

demands attention as a pre-condition to place the genres on the arch spanning over theatre and literature. An in-depth structural examination is likely to suggest that drama with a pronounced theatric tilt may become a farce. Comedy may emerge as a drama inclined towards literature, but via prose. Finally tragedy, it would be realised, comes to fruition because a dramatic presentation moves nearer to poetry through music.

9. Compared to the theatric, the dramatic can achieve an orientation which is noticeably social. The social bias would be in direct proportion to literary and prose-orientation. Literary and prose dramatic presentations are more representational than symbolic. Such manifestations patently bring out reform-centred attitudes as well as social and political concerns. All isms become potent forces when they rely on literary and prose orientations irrespective of their theatric significance.

The foregoing discussion should suffice to prove that the theatric/ dramatic thrives on the bi-polar tensions subsisting between sound-effect and music, representation and symbolism and finally between non-verbal and the literary. No single ism or theory can be expected to exercise control when such a multiplicity of pulls is in action simultaneously!

10. In the context of the present musico-dramatic inquiry it is of special significance to note that there is an unbroken arch between theatre and stage-play, the dominant theatric format of the recent centuries. Increasing collaboration with arts of various categories indicate and identifiable movement (and not progress) from theatre to stage-play. But the movement also registers a progressive loss of unquestioned supremacy of the theatric principle. For the sake of conceptual clarity (and in spite of the contemporary overlapping usage) I would like to distinguish between theatre, drama and the stage-play. It would be observed that these three developmental phases do not permit collaboration with other arts unless certain aesthetic demands are met with. For example the use of music in a stage-play has to be more specific and limited than its use in drama which in its turn is doubly particular in this respect when compared to the theatric employment of music. One can easily mark a progressive selectivity as well as refinement in matters such as meaningfulness (and not merely effectiveness) of the impact, deliberate and discriminating reliance on music-making devices and the growing number of the aesthetic criteria while moving from theatre to play. In composite art-forms such selectivity has a vital role. This is the reason why in forms such as opera, ballet, mime, shadow-play and the like a composite aesthetic sensibility becomes imperative. The argument outlined thus far has obvious implications in the musico-theatric expression as it appears in different cultures.

So far the aim has been to identify a fundamental theatric impulse as the origin of three related but perceivably separate manifestations namely theatre, drama and the play. The next step is to discuss the role of music in each. As is to be expected, three different kinds of musicality are found to strike a correspondence with the three kinds of presentations. In order to analyse the inter-art relationship between music and drama it is therefore required that the three kinds of music are also examined. However a minor point must be recorded before the three musics are taken up for discussion.

We have already touched upon manifestations particular to the theatre phase. A question could be asked: What are the manifestations specific to the drama phase? On account of the qualitative difference between theatre and drama both are bound to have forms special to them. Unless these are identified and recognised as such it would naturally be difficult to examine the correlated musics.

One answer is to follow the Western usage and name tragedy, comedy, farce and the like as genres specific to the drama phase. However, it is submitted that these genres are, in reality, particular to the play phase of the theatric. In fact genres specific to the drama phase are those which are customarily described as 'folk' or 'traditional forms of theatre. It has been pointed out earlier that the chief distinguishing criteria in relation to the three phases depend on the proportion and type of compositeness. The progressive tapering of the composite quality (noticeable while moving along the theatre-play axis) has also been commented upon. Forms such as tragedy, comedy, etc. are therefore to be categorized as plays. The contemporary theatre practice, taken in its entirety, seems to corroborate the conceptual distinction based on the degree and kind of compositeness. Most of the contemporary plays rely on folk elements when in search of compositeness. Usually plays take recourse to compositeness with a desire to counter the desiccation they would otherwise suffer from. This is the reason why mottos such as 'total theatre' or 'complete reality' become guiding principles and to substitute proseness by musicality becomes a major strategy.

Presentation in other performing arts also provides a kind of supportive evidence. For instance any particular performing art is usually described as dramatic when it attempts to turn composite by incorporating elements from other performing arts. This kind of borrowing is usually based on similarities between structural components of two or more arts concerned. It may also depend on parallel builds of the operated frameworks of ideas. For example in music an employment of a question-answer format, or adding to musical effectiveness through a pronounced use of the nonverbal presentational devices become the royal ways of making music dramatic. In both cases, music is unambiguously marked as dramatic in import because it succeeds in deviating from its own, routine channels of expression.

In sum theatre, drama and play are three distinct phases in which the dramatique (i.e. the basic theatric impulse) registers a progressively reduced compositeness. The reduction in compositeness is also coupled with a simultaneous movement towards lesser abstraction, increased verbalization and an escalating aestheticism. It is no wonder that each of the three phases is impressively wide-ranging and composite in varying degrees. Without exaggeration it could be said that the maximum number of art and non-art areas in human life are touched by the grace of the dramatique! A discussion of musicality vis-à-vis the three phases is to be pursued against this backdrop.

Chapter 02

MUSICALITY AND MUSICS

The discussion may begin with the observation that the widely prevalent (though often unstated) inclination to equate music with art-music must be cured! In itself art-music is merely a part of the total musical reality in any rich and complex culture. Further, art-music in itself can hardly hope to cover the range of musics associated with the three phases of the dramatique namely theatre, drama and the play. Hence a question to be briefly answered is: What is music?

A frequently quoted musicological definition of music, i.e. *sangeet*¹¹ runs in translation as 'the sung, the played and the danced is *sangeet*'. However this unfoldment of the meaning is a later and more sophisticated interpretation which ranges much beyond the core-meaning and the fundamental import. The essential characteristic of *sangeet* is conveyed by its bare etymology which depends on the two components namely *samyak* (i.e. complete) and *gai* (i.e. to produce a vocal sound). In this context *geet* (the important second half of the term) suggests another and more essential layer. The term *geet* is derived from the root *gama* (to go) and alludes to a very basic feature of any musical activity, namely, the uninterrupted progression, the 'going on and on' of voice which of course is a kind of sound. The usually overlooked point is that the early, traditional and Indian characterisation of music hardly allotted any role to language and linguistic meaning! However this conceptual tracing-back is not the main aim. The aim is not to discuss the origin of Indian music. The effort is to identify musicality, i.e. the pre-musical, wider manifestation of the human, musical impulse. It is to be borne in mind that a coming together of two or more performing activities necessitates an attainment of some sort of expressive/presentational equivalence/ balance to establish comfortable levels of correspondence between the combining arts. Usually these levels of relationships can be placed as a graduational or graduating arrangement beginning from the basic impulses to refined and rarefied art forms. Understood in this perspective the basic theatric impulse (preferably described as the dramatique to avoid confusion) would be juxtaposed with sheer, unadorned sound than what could be described as music. Sound can become manifest without being converted to music-ness or language-ness. Such sounds would of course possess the three acoustic dimensions of pitch, volume and timbre but they remain the least processed in respect of purposefulness, stylisation and precision of production. At this basic level the achievement of the sounds is

¹¹ *Bharatakosha*, compiled by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 2nd edition, 1983, p. 692.

restricted to becoming a signal. Very primary conversion strategies such as sound similarity, action-reaction comes into operation. Grunts, groans, cries, laughs, 'clak'-sounds, claps, foot-strokes, finger-snaps, etc. recur as rather gross expressions of the musical impulse to correlate with the primary theatric impulse (identified as the *dramatique*). Objects capable of producing acoustic results similar to or more effective than those described as primary are discovered and used, to be finally categorised as musical instruments. More numerous and different levels of musicality are reached as one moves further.

At this juncture it must be emphasized that primary manifestations of musicality at the level of sound and those at other levels are not to be placed on the inferior-superior scale because the functions carried out by these musics are too diverse. Performing arts are impact-oriented and the attempt is always to exploit all the levels efficiently. The levels obviously differ qualitatively and a mechanical application of narrowly defined criteria is of no help. Broadly speaking, musicality would be at its minimum at the theatre level. A step away is the phase of drama which provides a 'pleasanter music' as contrasted with the 'sounds' used at the theatre-level. The musicality operating at the drama level is also characterised by an undiluted functionalism. Music at the drama phase shoulders duties of alluding to processes, events, individuals or situations located outside the act of making music. Some of its referential operations are listed below illustratively.

1. Drama music brings together the target audience. Hence membranophonic instruments such as *dhol*, *halgi* or idiophonic instruments with similar power are employed to spread sound far and wide.
2. A change of scene is usually announced through music. This musical announcement is aimed at the characters (on and off the stage) as well as at the audience. A perceptible change in tempo or rhythm is frequently effected through instruments to facilitate the procedure.
3. Certain portions of the dialogue are emphasized by using suitable music. The procedure could well be described as a 'rural underlining'!
4. In a function typical of the drama music it is pressed into service to drive home the significance of dialogues carrying a 'message'. Certain dialogues, for example, are repeated with a recognizable musical overlay. The dialogue delivery is thus made more effective than its repetition in prose.
5. Some features of dramatic music, however, lack in functionalism. In this connection the accent on medium and fast tempi, employment of the *ardha-talas* and the numerous occasions on which *tihais* are introduced deserve analysis. Metres are exemplarily fluid and flexible. They are used so liberally that they cease to attract attention to themselves, a fact to be specifically noted.

6. All typical folk presentations are invariably characterized by a voice production which depends on high pitches and volume, the chief task being to reach the audience. Nasality and the falsetto also make effective appearances as 'special' timbres. They appear as instances of tonal symbolism in addition to inducing some tonal colour.

7. The overall importance of rhythm is undeniable. In fact the customary agents of melodic production are also often utilized to create rhythms.

8. Dance measures are widely distributed within a performance though the regional formulae differ considerably in this respect.

9. Folk tunes are repetitive but adequately attractive. They succeed in holding the attention of the listeners. However, elaborational possibilities are nearly non-existent, a feature which would assume importance when the role of stage music is considered.

10. Languages become significant as languages and literary values have a role at least in some major forms. There is decidedly more scope to apply literary criteria to folk drama than to the theatric manifestations.

Even a cursory region-based computation would reveal India to have (at least) sixteen genres of presentations usually classified as 'folk' dramas. For instance *Swang*, *Sangeet*, *Nautanki*, *Khayal*, *Manch*, *Kariyala*, *Bidesiya*, *Kuliyattam*, *Yakshagan*, *Bhagwatmela*, *Tamasha*, *Bhavai*, *Ankiya Nat*, *Bhand-Jashan*, *Ras lila*, *Jat-jatin*, etc. may be mentioned. Specific formal identities of these genres are to a large extent shaped by the languages, costumes, etc. used and yet a fundamental uniformity is detected in their respective modes of presentation, especially in the musical textures. In other words, the genres display family resemblances. The (folk) dramatic forms are thus clearly differentiated from the theatric genres discussed earlier or the stage plays to be considered later.

Stage Play and Music

A little recapitulation may be convenient at this point.

I have argued that two developmental phases of the basic theatric impulse (i.e. the dramatique) logically precede the contemporary stage play. Respective important characteristics of the two phases were therefore discussed. This discussion was followed by a brief statement of the musical correlatives (naturally two in number). It is obvious that in both these phases, namely theatre and (folk) drama, two major performing expressions combined to make the situation explosive with the participants supplying the ignition! This was inevitable because participation in theatre and drama means an active role of

those who otherwise would remain merely spectators/auditors. However the stage-play registers an important deviation in this respect. Generally speaking the basic theatric impulse or the dramatique becomes observably narrower in scope and sharper in intent as one move from theatre to stage play through drama. The third phase, i.e. the stage play naturally responds musically to the critical change. In other words the coming together of two major performing expressions results in a four-tiered dynamic relationship of two, separable and differently motivated structures. To juxtapose them would be instructive.

The Dramatique	The Musical
<i>Theatre</i>	<i>Primary sounds</i>
<i>Drama</i>	<i>Functional and processed sound</i>
<i>Stage play</i>	<i>Music</i>

In this manner stage play turns out to be a phase in which art principle asserts itself. Consequently, structural components are more rigorously selected, presentations become more deliberate and organized, diverse mechanisms are arranged in a complex manner-all designed to make possible a flawless performance. In fact play phase is the only phase of the dramatique in which two performing arts (as distinct from expressions) come together.

It needs to be appreciated that stage play emerges as a culmination of a cultural process indicating a definite and critical social development. As such its nature can be understood only in terms of a totality of circumstances inclusive of the non-art and the non-aesthetic. It is therefore essential to examine in some detail the idea of a stage play.

Characteristics of a Stage play

1. It is in the play-phase that the dramatique seeks a stage, i.e. an area demarcated for the actors to perform. A further refinement on the area demarcation is the raising of the acting area to create a platform. From the contemporary perspective the raised platform could be described as a step towards the proscenium.

By all accounts the Westerners of the late eighteenth century were the first to introduce in India the proscenium and the accompanying paraphernalia. For example it was the British soldiers posted in Bombay (who to avoid the boredom) constructed a temporary theatre in the area known as Bombay Green in 1750. The theatre known as Bombay Theatre was made 'permanent' in

1770.¹² It has also been recorded that the Portuguese who secured an early foothold in India tried out the stage format in Diu in order to propagate the Word more effectively. The Portuguese came to Diu in 1534. As Randheria and others pointed out, the Gospel was spread by presenting what was known as the 'Tamasha of Yeshu Masiha'. A temporary stage was reportedly in vogue in Spain, Portugal and Rome. Also brought in was the novelty of curtains, costumes as well as make-up.¹³

2. More notably, in a stage play not only the performing area but the performers also are clearly separated from the audience. The seating area is so marked, and arrangements are so made, that a remarkable change is brought about in the attitude of the audience. It becomes clear that on account of the segregation the members of the audience truly become spectators!

It is as if they serve a notice of their detached and aloof way of looking at things through the position, posture, etc. of their sitting! The auditor of a stage play becomes a witness to a process external to him in contrast with the theatre-goer who is very much a part of the proceedings.

A number of devices are employed to partition off the performers from the spectators. Curtains of different sizes are hung purposefully at the required locations. Wings are erected and angled with great deliberation. Lighting sources are also specially devised and arranged with the same aim. The attitude change is of course not sudden. The change takes place slowly and there are periods and performances exemplifying the overlap between drama and play phases. This could be easily seen in the early performances of stage plays in Maharashtra, Bengal and other Indian regions where the advent of the British brought about a change-over from drama to play. In this context it is instructive to note that way back in 1846 the *Bombay Times* and *Journal of Commerce* commented in its pages on the early 'Hindoo' drama staged in the Khetwaddy Theatre in Bombay. It said

*The Theatre in Khetwaddy... is as yet without moveable scenes and.... what is usually reckoned the pit serves the purpose of the stage, benches all round rise tier above tier and are occupied rightly by hundreds of respectable, well-conducted, and most attentive natives of all classes and creeds.*¹⁴

It is on record that when Vishnudas Bhave, founder of the Marathi music stage used to perform *Sita Swayamvar* (from 1843 onwards) the audience contributed money when the ritualistic collection through *arati* took place at the end of the

¹² *Gujarati Rangbhuminu Itihas Darshan*, Vol. I, edited by Jayantilal R. Trivedi and Madhukar R. Randheria, Gujarati Natya Mandal, Bombay, 1984, p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ Somnath Gupta, *Parsi Theatre: Udbhav Aur Vikas*, Lokbharati Prakashan, Allahabad, 1987, p. 20.

performance.¹⁵ The practice was obviously discontinued when he performed 'professionally' in Bombay in 1853 for the first time.

Another instance is from the performances of the first modern play ('bookish' as such plays were described by the contemporaries) by Kirtane entitled *Thorale Madhavrao Peshwe Yanche Natak* (1861). In it was depicted a *sati* sacrifice. To offer last respects to the woman undergoing self-immolation is believed to be a sacred act. As a result so many women used to come on the stage that the performance could not proceed further for long hours!¹⁶

Yet another interesting mode of participation (by the audience) was extraordinarily perfected by the Parsi-Hindi stage, the tradition which had its beginning in Bombay around 1854.¹⁷ Plays in this tradition were written in such a manner that an easy, rhyming versification had a field day. Additionally, refrains, slogans and such other group-oriented expressions were so composed and delivered that actors needed to recite only half-lines which were then duly completed by the expectant participating audience!¹⁸

3. Stage play is an undoubted urban emergence. Its rise usually depends on factors such as multi-lingual demographic distribution, diversity of concurrent entertainment channels, and abundance of secular festivities. In fact stage play could be taken to suggest increasing urbanization of a society. In this respect evidence from various stage traditions is instructive. For example, Mr C.C. Mehta, the grand old man of the Gujarati stage tradition, has noted that during a period of hundred years or more (from 1884 onwards) performing troupes were distributed in Gujarat thus: Surat - 7, Vadodara - 4, Ahmedabad - 2, Bombay - 10-12 and at least one each in the princely States.¹⁹ The story was not different in Maharashtra or Bengal, etc.

For example, the Parsi tradition (originating in Bombay around 1854) continued to flourish in the region. But more importantly, many companies/ troupes subscribing to the particular style of presentation (brought to eminence by the Parsi tradition) struck roots and prospered in cities elsewhere in the country. The following tabulated data would prove instructive in this connection:²⁰

¹⁵ S.N. Banhatti, *Marathi Rangbhoomicha Itihas*, Venus Prakashan, Pune, 1957, p. 54.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁷ Laxminarayan Lal, *Parsi Hindi Rangmach*, Rajpal and Sons, Delhi, 1973, p. 18.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁹ *Gujarati Rangbhuminu Itihas Darshan*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁰ *Parsi Theatre: Udbhav aur Vikas*, Gupta Somnath, Lokbharati Prakashan, Allahabad, 1981, pp. 87-112, 237-43.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Home City</i>	<i>Established in</i>
Zoroastrian Theatrical Club	Bombay	1866
Persian Zoroastrian Club	Bombay	1870
Victorian Natak Mandali	Bombay	1868
Empress Victoria Natak Mandali	Delhi	1876
Alfred Natak Mandali	Bombay	1868
Parsi Natak Mandali	Bombay	1853
Albert Company	Madras	?
Nizami Company	Hyderabad	?
Ripan Indian Club	Peshawar	?
Oriental Opera and Dramatic Company	Lahore	before 1887
The Indian Dilpajir Theatrical Company of Itawah	Itawah	Before 1893
The Indian Imperial Theatrical Company of Agra	Agra	?
Corinthian Natak Mandali	Calcutta	?
Bharat Vyakul Company	Meerut	?

In Maharashtra too the pattern is similar. For example:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Home City</i>	<i>Established in</i>
The Bhave Group	Sangli	1843
The Bapat Group	Ichalkaranji	1850
Amarchandvadikar Natak Mandali	Bombay	1855

Some other groups were established and flourished in Pune (1855), Tasgaon (1859), Karhad, Umbraj, Satara, Vadi, Kolhapur (1865), Alte (1869) as also in Miraj, Chaulwadi, Bhir, Wai, Kurundwad, Belgaon, Ramdurg and Nargund, etc.²¹

It is on record that Bengal registered perhaps the earliest beginning of the play phase on account of Lebedev's inspired efforts in 1795. However the initiative he had seized was not immediately followed up and the 'Bengali' inspired stage made its first stirrings felt later in 1835 when Babu Navinchandra Basu of Shyam Bajar put up a performance of the play titled Vidyasundar. Calcutta and its environs abounded in stage activity as also other smaller townships which took the clue from the big city. (Historians agree that Babu Navinchandra's effort cannot probably be treated as the true beginnings of the Bengali stage). As a consequence an interesting distribution of the play activity took place. Both individuals as well as established troupes were responsible.

²¹ Ashok D. Ranade, Stage Music of Maharashtra, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1986, p. 5.

<i>Name of the Play</i>	<i>Home City</i>	<i>Established in</i>
Abhidnyan Shakuntala	Simla	1855
Kulin Koolsarvasva	Calcutta	1858
Venisamhara	Calcutta (Vidyotsahini Rangamanch)	1856
Ratnavali	Calcutta (Belgachia Natyagriha)	1858
Swarnashrinkhala	Barisal	1859
Ekehi Bale Ki Sabhyata	Maimansingh	1865
Chandravati	Hoogley	1870
Leelavati	Chunchura	1872
Ramabhishek	Dhaka ²²	1872

4. It is to be appreciated that the rise of the middle class is invariably connected with the origin and development of the stage play. Plebeians, as a class, are ready to deviate from the established pattern of education. They tend to welcome new mass media with a conscious eagerness. Finally they are also willing (however grudgingly) to accept the altered equations between educational qualifications and the changed social status. On a closer look the middle strata reveals two layers which could be differentiated. One consists of those new professionals who are monied and the other of those numerous who are not so well-placed but care for culture and generally for 'things of the mind'. In most cases middle class is at once the patron and initiator of a stage play. Some instances are noteworthy.

The original Bombay Theatre (established in 1750 and made permanent in 1770) proved a financial liability. It was therefore decided to enlist the help of the 'natives'. An appeal for financial support was issued in 1830s. As a result about ten prominent Indians became patrons. The composition of the new group was interesting: six Parsis, two Gujaratis and two Maharashtrians!²³

In his bird's-eye view of the evolution of the Bengali stage Dr Ajitkumar Ghosh has perceptively pointed out that even though the nascent Bengali play phase was heavily financed by landlords and members of the monied class, their support lacked in durability. It was only the middle class which identified itself closely with the stage and hence led to its continued as well as wide-based development.²⁴

²² Brijendranath Chattopadhyaya, *Bangiya Natyashalar Itihas*, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, 1365, pp. 31-71.

²³ *Gujarati Rangbhuminu Itihas Darshan*, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁴ Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Ajitkumar Ghosh, eds., *Shatvarshe Natyashala*, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, 1973, p. 126.

Somnath Gupta has referred to the preferences of the spectators in the Parsi theatre. They liked the depiction of love episodes from Iranian history or adapted themes with a bearing on British culture. However, their response to Indian (Hindu) mythology was also equally enthusiastic. All in all the heterogeneity and the middle class loyalties of the patrons were noticeable.²⁵ In the Marathi stage tradition too the scene was dominated by the middle class and especially the newly educated professionals practicing law, medicine, teaching, trade or journalism. The first ever stage venture in Marathi, that of Vishnudas Bhave in 1853, was propelled into the limelight by persons such as Dr Bhau Daji, Sh. Nana Shankar Sheth and Sir Jamshetji in Bombay and personalities of the calibre of Prof. Kerunana Chhatre and Pt Krishnashastry Chiplunkar in Pune.²⁶

5. A stage play is invariably a part of a general, all-round movement directed to establish an overgrowing complex of influencing agencies (admittedly a bad translation of the term *sanskarak sanstha*!). In other words plays are symptomatic of the urge felt for a cultural renaissance. The fact is reflected in two observable features of the concerned society: the kinds of institutions it encourages and builds with zest and secondly the motives that propel playwrights, actors, etc. (In the Indian context a certain sense of pride for a society, region, religion, etc. would be found to characterize plays). In this respect the number, nature (and even names) of educational institutions, organizations devoted to social and cultural work, newspapers, magazines published in vernacular languages, ... in fact every form of activity that brings people together and makes them conscious of their own identity becomes worth noting. It is not coincidental that the stage phase in Maharashtra also saw a parallel growth of education, journalism, political activity and social reforms. For example the Board of Education established in Bombay in 1840 laid the foundations of a very comprehensive educational policy. It led to the spreading of a wide network in the State of institutions of a certain standard. The Department of Education (1855), the University of Bombay (1857), etc. only confirm the multi-levelled process. It is equally interesting to note that the opinion-setting newspaper *Kesari*, as also the pioneering Kirloskar Natak Mandali began their careers in 1880! The Indian Congress was founded in 1885 and the social reformers did not lag behind. Against this background the emergence and prosperity of at least three stage traditions - namely Marathi, Parsi (Hindi/Urdu) and Gujarati (in and around Bombay during the nineteenth century) is not surprising.

²⁵ Somnath Gupta, op. cit., p. 217.

²⁶ Ashok D. Ranade, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

The evidence from Bengal is corroborative.

* Mr John Beams a civil servant suggested in 1872 the establishment of an academy of Bengali literature. After prolonged debate the Bengal Academy of Literature was established in 1893 under the patronage of Benoy Krishna Deb of Shobhabazar Rajbhati.

* A noteworthy role was played by the numerous literary journals in shaping the enthusiastic minds of the 'new' literates in Bengal. *Samvad Prabhakar* (1831) edited by Ishwarchandra Gupta, *Tattvabodhini Patrika* (1843) brought out by the Brahmo Samaj, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Bangadarshan* (1872), the epoch-making *Bharati* (1877) inspired by Dwijendranath Tagore, and *Sahitya* (1890) edited by Sureshchandra Samajpati influenced the Bengali genius considerably.²⁷

Some illustrative facts from Gujarat are supportive of the argument put forward.

* Alexander Forbes, an officer of the East India Company, was posted at Ahmadabad where he founded the Gujarat Vernacular Society in 1848 and appointed a poet of the calibre of Dalpatram (1820–98) to carry out the task of collecting and preserving manuscripts, translating works from English into Gujarati, etc. In Bombay the Forbes Gujarati Sabha was founded in 1886.

* A daily, *Mumbai Samachar* (1822), and *Janmabhoomi* an evening paper (1934) have played a role in creating and maintaining literary awareness. Among the periodicals, *Buddhiprakash* (1850), *Gujarati Shalapatra* (1862), *Dnyansudha* (1886), *Priyamvada* (1885) and *Samalochak* (1890) can be easily listed.

6. Stage plays are inconceivable without an adequate development of prose, a modality to be contrasted with verse. A number of Indian languages enjoy durable literary achievement but each naturally registered a different period of fruition depending on the dynamics of its evolution. Prose as a mode of expression was therefore perfected at varying points of time. It is to be remembered that prose is not only a way of handling linguistic material but also a way of thinking and responding to reality. Hence the availability of an efficient prose is symptomatic of a critical cultural stance.

In Maharashtra the evolution of prose could be seen as a direct consequence of the new educational system introduced by the British. During the period immediately succeeding the educational intervention (1857–74) nearly twenty plays were translated from Sanskrit into Marathi (though only seven Shakespearean plays were translated by 1879). It has been noted that the period represents the phase in which secular, imaginative, modern prose and the new genre of essay gained stature for the first time. With a slight and logical

²⁷ Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1960, pp. 163-74.

deviation the early attempts at Bengali prose indicated either the *munshi* (i.e. Persian) or the *pundit* (i.e. Sanskrit) dominance in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Translations from Sanskrit continued to trickle in, aiding the development of prose. Sukumar Sen mentions *Prabodhchandrika* (translated in 1833) by Mritunjay as the best known prose work in Bengali but rightly adds that the most influential agents in developing Bengali prose were the journals beginning with the *Samachardarpan* (1818) of Serampore. Some more facts are instructive in this respect. In 1851 the Department of Education of the Government sponsored the Vernacular Literature Committee entrusting it with the sole task of fostering a healthy domestic literature in Bengali. From the year of its inception the Committee started bringing out a monthly, *Vividharthsangraha* (collection of various matters). Edited by Rajendralal Mitra (d. 1891) the publication is reported to have exercised considerable sway over young minds destined to become literary figures in later years. In addition Raja Rammohan Roy (1774–1833), Devendranath Tagore (1817–1905), Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–91) and others contributed diversely towards the evolution of an effective prose.²⁸

Dramatic prose is also greatly aided by a stabilized idiom in literary prose which is usually signalled by the emergence and development of a suitable form. In the Indian context the genre of essay performed the feat. Experts agree that the essay in modern Indian languages has been a gift of the nineteenth century renaissance in India. It has been noted that the form emerged in Gujarati with Narmad's writings (1833–86). In Hindi the essay-writers made a mark for the first time during the Bharatendu era (1850–1900).²⁹

Aga Hashr Kashmiri (1879–1935) often described as the Shakespeare of the Urdu Stage has been credited with bringing the commercial theatre closer to literature not only by formulating a capable prose idiom but also by combining with it the colloquial speech full of dramatic verve.³⁰

7. Stage plays need a particular kind of patronage. Firstly it has to be less centralized than the feudal support though it may also enjoy an aristocratic generosity, at least in the initial phases. Patronage to stage is less homogeneous, more generally distributed and often unashamedly nostalgic about cultural matters.

The pioneering stage troupes in Maharashtra (as well as their performances) were patronized by royalty and/or aristocracy. However the patronage soon shifted to a wider, culture-conscious middle class. Ticketed shows became regular. To ensure the newly won public patronage it was necessary to have a

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 178–90.

²⁹ Amaresh Datta, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, Vol. II, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 1212–24.

³⁰ Ibid., Mohammed Hasan, p. 1117.

supportive mechanism consisting of variable admission charges, publicity and advertisements, contracted shows, staggered performance timings and scheduling responsive to the local needs. This was achieved soon and an urban activization of a marketing system became evident.³¹

Things were not much different for the Parsi tradition patronized by Iranis, Hindus and Muslims alike.³²

In Bengal there was a marginal difference. In the first place some of the Bengali landlords/aristocrats were actively involved staging the plays and were not mere patrons. However, more interestingly, their generous support has been mainly faulted for its erratic, inconsistent quality and for the lack of depth of interest (though admittedly there were exceptions). Bandyopadhyay also notes that these efforts needed coordination without which they remained outbursts of personal enthusiasm.³³ Elsewhere Dr Ajitkumar Ghosh has judged the wealthier classes harshly in observing that their interest in theatre was a fashion and a temporary addiction! He asserts that it was the committed middle class which created the Bengali Stage.³⁴ Raha agrees when he writes that (by 1873),

*the theatre owners and the actors now looked to the rapidly expanding class of salary-earners, shop-keepers, rentiers, white-collar workers, lawyers, doctors and teachers for support, financial as well as artistic.*³⁵

8. Stage plays herald the acceptance of and often the insistence on carefully constructed plots, realistic set designs as well as a concern for common themes.

The first two Bengali plays published in 1852, namely *Kirtivilas* (G.C. Gupta) and *Bhadrarjuna* (Taracharan Sikdar) followed the Shakespearean mode in plot construction. From the pre-Michael M. Dutt period Ramnarayan Tarkaratna (1822–86) emerges as the most notable playwright. He wrote farces on problems that plagued the common man. Michael M. Dutt (1824-73), the most revolutionary playwright for the nascent Bengali stage, disowned the Sanskrit model entirely and firmly pinned his faith on Shakespeare in respect of plot construction, characterization and tragic effect.³⁶ Dinabandhu Mitra's (1829–74) *Neel Darpan* (1860) is well-known for its propagandist realism.

In Maharashtra the earliest attempts pertaining to the stage obviously represent a transitory phase and hence display some features of the theatre phase. In other words, absence of realism, lack of set design in the early efforts of a stage phase

³¹ Stage Music of Maharashtra, op. cit., pp. 9–10.

³² *Parsi Theatre: Udbhav aur Vikas*, op. cit., pp. 213-15.

³³ *Bangiya Natyashalar Itihas*, op. cit., p. 30.

³⁴ Shatvarsha Natyashala, op. cit., p. 120.

³⁵ Kironmoy Raha, *Bengali Theatre*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1978, p. 25.

³⁶ *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, op. cit., p. 1067.

constitutes negative corroborative evidence. Hence it is interesting to note that an anonymous writer in Dnyanprakash (dated May 26, 1862) while commenting on Bhave's performances in Bombay, said,

*In reality none of the performances seen today are fit to be called plays. Those who have read Sanskrit and English plays would easily realize this. These plays do not have samvidhanak, i.e. plot as it is known in English. (Author's translation)*³⁷

Of equal interest is Appaji Vishnu Kulkarni's account (published in 1903) in which he clearly deplores the lack of sets, wings and curtains in Bhave's performance.³⁸ Other contemporary observations confirm. For example, a sympathetic review in the then *Bombay Times* (March 11, 1853) mentions that,

Scenery and the other similar accessories that so much aid the effect of a dramatic representation, were entirely overlooked!³⁹

On the other hand, as Dr Lal has noted, set and costumes were the main assets of the Parsi stage with realism figuring low on the list!⁴⁰ This is, however, logical in view of the themes favoured by the Parsi tradition. A preponderance of legendary love stories, exaggerated and melodramatic versions of suitable English plays and the general preference for heroic and romantic themes demanded and received the required response from the Parsi tradition.⁴¹ However it meant a delayed play phase for the Hindi and Urdu languages.

9. It is in the play phase that dialogue acquires a specific function and enjoys an undisputed authority to operate in a larger range of tasks. Dialogues firstly came to be 'constructed' purposefully in the initial years of the play phase. A little later they came to be written down to be passed on. This is only a step away from the dialogues getting printed and made accessible to the 'public' in general. This way the written/printed word rises in esteem and the fact is reflected in the insistence of the audience on the actor's faithful, undistorted rendering of the dialogues as they are written.

Ranade has traced this gradual, methodical and deliberate movement towards a well-formulated dialogue in the Marathi play phase. For example Bhave was the first producer who taught dialogues to the players to ensure a proper recitation. The Datar troupe took a cue from him but went a step ahead. Datar Shastri, the producer, began the vogue of preparing two separate and written versions of speeches and songs respectively. By 1861 the 'bookish' plays took roots, i.e.

³⁷ M.S. Krishnamurthi and Tara Bhavalkar, *Yakshagan ani Marathi Natyaparampara*, Marathi Sahitya Parishad, Hyderabad, 2nd edition, 1980.

³⁸ *Marathi Rangbhoomi*, 2nd edition, Venus Prakashan, Pune, 1903, p. 41.

³⁹ *Marathi Rangbhoomicha Itihas*, op. cit., appendix 7, p. 397.

⁴⁰ *Parsi Hindi Rangmanch*, op. cit., pp. 107-8, 115.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

play-scripts came to be written and printed to be published. It is symptomatic that many of the handbills produced for publicity in the early period included an assurance that the play would be performed as per the book!⁴²

The Parsi tradition also confirms the pattern of perfecting dialogue as an instrument. Two essential categories of dialogues emerged in it on account of various historical and performing conditions. One of them proved conducive to emotional outpourings and outbursts while the other facilitated movements. As a consequence song and the rhythmic overlays became inevitable. Great craftsmanship and virtuosity was therefore displayed in constructing dialogues. In addition the dialogues also provided for audience participation which became a distinguishing feature of the tradition. Dialogues in this tradition were so constructed that end-rhymes, half-lines, etc. were uttered aloud by the audience according to the established norms and style. The actors consciously built up their delivery to such points and playwrights created inbuilt spaces for them in their writing!⁴³

In Bengal, playwrights went through the inevitable paces of translating and adapting, first English and subsequently Sanskrit plays from 1853 onwards. One other channel was of farces and social satires. As a result versification and verse-influenced prose remained the major modes of exploring language. Therefore dialogues energized with a dramatic flair were keenly awaited. Michael M. Dutt dared to introduce passages of unrhymed verse in *Sharmishtha* (1858) and his third play *Krishnakumari* (1861) was entirely written in prose (though it contained some songs). However by all accounts a perceivable groping towards effective dialogue continued till Girishchandra Ghosh (1844–1911), the prolific playwright-actor-producer-director came on the scene and perfected his idiom around 1881. Raha in his compact survey of Bengali theatre credits Ghosh with being the first major innovator of Bengali theatrical dialogue.⁴⁴

10. As a class/kind stage plays are found to be exceptionally suitable to claim and proclaim regional, cultural and national identities. Plays have been thus ‘used’ with remarkable intensity and persistence. Political leaders have been idolized or caricatured through them. Plays have been banned or promoted for the messages they sought to convey. Plays, it is recognized, constitute an agency to project images of particular cultures, personalities and to strengthen/weaken socio-political ideologies as well as movements. Institutions and individuals working in different walks of life have therefore stepped forward willingly to associate with various stage traditions. All evidence suggests that stage plays offer a refuge for the non-art historical-social-political-

⁴² Stage Music of Maharashtra, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴³ *Parsi Hindi Rangmanch*, op. cit., pp. 91-98.

⁴⁴ Kironmoy Raha, *Bengali Theatre*, op. cit., p. 45.

ideological forces in search of an outlet. Nearly all Indian stage traditions provide supportive evidence.

For example nationalism and the nationalist movement had close links with the Parsi-Hindi stage.

Bharatendu Harishchandra, Jayshankar Prasad, Vinayakprasad Talib, Narayanprasad Betab, Radheshyam Kathavachak, Aga Hashr Kashmiri and others wrote plays aimed at glorifying the Indian cultural heritage and indirectly projecting legitimacy on the anti-British struggle of the nationalists. Allegorical plays/ treatment extolling the freedom movement were recurrent.

Pt. Motilal Nehru, the then President of the Indian National Congress, was invited to bless the first performance of Radheshyam Kathavachak's play *Ishwarbhakti* (1929).⁴⁵

Very often even in mythological plays such as *Pralhad* (1916), nationalist songs and dialogues were introduced when CID personnel were not detected in the audience!⁴⁶

In a way loyalty to the British was the logical counterpart of nationalism! This was also discernible. The Indian Theatrical Company staged a play called *Nanasaheb* (1868) in which the Maratha hero of the 1857 war of independence was depicted as a seditious character.⁴⁷

Generally speaking after 1910 the glorification of the past and encouragement offered to the freedom struggle became prominent in the Parsi-Hindi tradition.

In the Marathi tradition it is symptomatic to note that the first 'bookish' play, i.e. play printed and published as a book was *Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe Yanche Natak* (1861). The protagonist of the play has succeeded in winning back partially some of the glory the Marathas lost at the battle of Panipat (1761). The Peshwa died young and his wife performed *sati*, an obvious assertion of a regional/national convention. The play was naturally taken to symbolize an assertion of the Maratha culture.

Yet another instance of the nationalism-play phase nexus is provided by the scores of plays banned by the rulers because of their anti-British stance. For example the list would include:

⁴⁵ *Parsi Hindi Rangmanch*, op. cit., pp. 49–50.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

<i>Play</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>
1. <i>Panpatcha Mukabla</i>	G.D. Gadkari	1897
2. <i>Lokmat Vijay</i>	A.V. Barve, G. G. Soman	1898
3. <i>Barisalchi Dhamdhoom or Lokvidamban</i>	?	1906
4. <i>Vijay Toran</i>	R.M. Mhysarkar	1909
5. <i>Kalicha Narad</i>	K.H. Dixit	1910
6. <i>Keechakvadh</i>	K.P. Khadilkar	1904 Banned in 1910
7. <i>Dandadhari</i>	D.V. Nevalkar	1907
8. <i>Udepurcha Maharana Pratap Singh</i>	A.V. Barve	1911
9. <i>Sangeet Lanka Vidhvans</i>	G.D. Kane	1905 Banned in 1912
10. <i>Mahatmyacha Satyagraha</i>	V.N. Kothivale	1921

An act to empower the government to exercise control over dramatic performances was passed in 1876. Instances of bans imposed on the singing of individual song renditions are also not lacking. For example:

<i>First Line</i>	<i>Play</i>	<i>Year</i>
<i>Anyadharmi bhoopal aryabhoocha</i>	Sharda	1898
<i>Deshbhakta prasad bandishala</i>	Prabhavati	?
<i>Parvashta pash daive</i>	Sanyasta Khadga	1931

It is also interesting to note that *Neel Darpan*, the rebellions play from Bengal was translated into Marathi on account of its anti-British stance and the note of regional assertion sounded therein. The play written by Dinbandhu Mitra in 1861 is a telling instance from the early phase of the Bengali stage tradition and its accommodation of the nationalist feeling. With its direct and realistic depiction of a 'white' oppressor, a harassed native woman and her native protector the play aroused the ire of the British rulers. Binodini Devi, the well-known actress, has narrated dramatically what took place when the play was performed in Lucknow in 1875.⁴⁸ Yet another instance is of the ban imposed on the *Surendra-Binodini* because it lampooned a Bengali bureaucrat volunteering to take the Prince of Wales (the later King Edward VII), a foreigner, to the interiors of a Bengali home! The author of the lampoon, Upendranath Das (1847-95), thus became the first to provide opportunity to the British

⁴⁸ Ashutosh Bhattacharya, ed., *Nati Vinodini: Rachna Samagra*, Vinodini Dasi, Sahitya Samstha, Calcutta, 1394, p. 72.

government to use its might against theatric freedom. Thus the Dramatic Performances Control Act of 1876 came into effect and significantly a majority of plays were banned for propagating the nationalist credo.⁴⁹

11. The Indian stage play bifurcated in two recognizably separate streams, prose play and the music play as a cumulative result of the ten characteristics discussed so far. Music play, the theme of the present debate, assumes a different identity depending on the strengths and depths of the regional musical traditions. Interaction with the prose cognate also varies according to the regional strengths. In this respect Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali and Hindi traditions offer interesting data. Dr Sukumar Sen has put forward the bifurcation of the Bengali theatre as resulting into educational and entertainment channels, with the latter, in his opinion, included the operatic.⁵⁰ This may not be acceptable because the operatic also dealt with educational and didactic themes. However his reference to the strong current of music plays supports the general position. Some data related to the argument is given below:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<i>Seeta Swayamvar</i>	Vishnudas Bhave	1843	Marathi	First music play
<i>Thorle Madhavrao Peshve Yanche Natak</i>	Keertane	1861	Marathi	First prose play
<i>Vidhvavivaha Natak</i>	Umeshchandra Mitra	1856	Bengali	First prose play
<i>Ramabhishek</i>	Manmohan Basu	1867	Bengali	First music play
<i>Lakshmi</i>	Dalpatram	1850	Gujarati	First published play
<i>Gulab</i>	N.T. Marfatia	1862	Gujarati	First original play
<i>Kanhaiya Ka Kissa</i>	Wajid Ali	1854	Urdu	Precursor of the Indrasabha model
<i>Satya Harishchandra</i>	Bharatendu Harishchandra	1875	Hindi	First original play
<i>Bharat Janani</i>	Bharatendu Harishchandra	1877	Hindi	First original opera

⁴⁹ History of Bengali Literature, op. cit., p. 246.

⁵⁰ History of Bengali Literature, op. cit., p. 247.

Chapter 03

STAGE PLAY AND MUSIC

To describe the main features of the stage phase of the dramatique is to prepare the ground for considering the music associated with it. Only then would it be possible to understand the qualitative change the stage phase represents in the inter-art relationship discussed.

Music of the stage play can conveniently be described as stage music. An attempt is to be made to seek evidence from more than one Indian tradition.

1. Stage music is deliberate, planned and art-oriented in conception. It is performed under consciously controlled conditions. Many of the criteria applied in its conception, use or reception lean admittedly towards craftsmanship and virtuosity. However the aesthetic set of criteria is not far behind. Stage music attracts attention to itself with a marked insistence.

Vishnudas Bhave's pioneering venture in 1843 was blessed by the King of Sangli and the first performance took place in the palace premises (called Heramb Mahal), a very obvious indication of the controlled conditions. More importantly the Sutradhar of Bhave's plays became the sole singer. The characters delivered their dialogues, made an (optional) allusion to the song to be sung by the Sutradhar, who then burst forth! Bhave has noted that he made the actors learn by heart all the dialogues, once again pointing to the deliberate and a thoroughly planned music and especially the conscious forging of its relationship with the dialogue. The other prominent troupe, led by Datar Shastri of Ichalkaranji, went a step further and wrote down the verses as well as the prose portions in separate notebooks. Bhave also took care to compose songs in different *ragas* in clean contrast with the then prevailing practice of using mere tunes. It is significant that by the 1880s, Kirloskar's stage music was not only presented by the participating characters but very often the major characters (being trained musicians) composed their respective number themselves!

2. Stage music is keen to find and explore idioms, styles and forms capable of transcending region and language barriers. In this context the essential urban origin and platform of the stage phase is also to be remembered.

In a country with a sub-continental expanse and the overwhelming variety of creeds, castes and classes, music and myth have always served the purpose of surmounting difficulties created by regional and linguistic barriers. Music wise the first step in the direction is to rely on the musical system which subsumes

the more focussed regional variety namely the folk. Bhave distinguished himself by a deliberate and more aesthetic exploration of the *raga* corpus. It is true that Bhave and even the later masters such as Kirloskar (1843–85), Deval (1855-1916) and Kolhatkar (1871–1934) made use of *ragas* in the Carnatic system. However the way these were used was entirely that of the Hindustani system of art-music. By the turn of the nineteenth century the practice of modelling the stage music compositions completely on the existing prototypes in art-music was well-entrenched. The third phase was to compose music in the established format of the genres such as *khayal*, *thumri*, *tarana*.

3. The Indian scene is unique in enjoying fairly long traditions of all the five categories of music, namely primitive, folk, devotional, art and popular. From the pentad no category is taboo to stage music but it obviously accentuates art music. It is clear that art music renders a helping hand to overcome barriers encountered due to regional and linguistic diversity. One may also state that stage music flourishes if solo music-making is allowed easy scope. This feature is especially relevant because of the intrinsically melodic (as opposed to harmonic) character of Indian music as also the tilt towards making music solo.

In Maharashtra the pre-Bhave phase (and a period of the Bhave phase itself) was described as '*allal-durr*' and '*tagad-thom*'! The former constituted the war cries of the demon-characters who entered with matching vigorous movements predictably to terrify the weaker sections of the audience while the latter indicate the sonorous syllables of the *mridang* and *jhanjh* accompaniment that formed the main instrumental support. This easily was music of a primitive experiential content. A number of plays relied heavily on women's songs, *lavanis* and such other forms of folk music. Plays based on the life of Tukaram and other saints naturally employed *bhajan*, *abhang*, *pada*, and similar other varieties of devotional genres from the devotional category. The tendency to explore and exploit the corpus of art music was always on the increase from the inception of the stage phase. This was discernible in the number of songs composed in *ragas* and *talas* particular to art music, in the variety of forms utilized, in the general practice of engaging 'classical' musicians of high renown to compose tunes as also in the abundance of singing heroes and (male) heroines who had received systematic exposure to (and often training in) art music from established *ustads* and *gurus*. Compared to other ways of vocalizing such as choral numbers, duets, dance songs, etc., Marathi stage-music abounded in compositions designed for singing solo. The soloists frequently enjoyed encores and often aimed at them to the chagrin of fellow-actors on the stage and to the detriment of the dynamics of the plot! Critics have recorded their disapproval of the ascendancy of music on the Marathi stage stating that whatever be the musical effectiveness of the singing it certainly proved the undoing of the Marathi dramatic taste in general.

4. On a majority of occasions stage plays display a jealous regard for middle class values in most aspects such as themes, language, presentation devices, etc. However, comparatively speaking, stage music displays an accommodative stance. As a consequence music of the strata/classes otherwise described as 'lower' easily finds a place in the stage phase. For this very noticeable musical liberalism the probable reason is a desire for variety.

5. One of the inspiring forces during the play phase is a cultural attempt to revive music of the earlier periods. Popular or modern music is not viewed with favour even though no major musical resurrections are detected!

6. Mainly as a consequence of the change in patronage, stage music prefers to dilute the 'scientific' aspect of art music. A heavy dependence on more effective and dazzling technique is also noticeable.

In Maharashtra a very early and action-oriented protest against the dilution of art music by the prevailing stage music was perhaps recorded by Pt. Pandaba Yevteshwarkar, a renowned vocalist of the late nineteenth century. Voicing his dissatisfaction he employed dhrupad-singing of high complexity and austerity in his *Dyutavinod* (1892). His tunes consequently proved difficult to master or to render and required months of rigorous training. Pt. Govindrao Tembe (1881-1955), himself a renowned harmonium-player, composer, actor and writer of music, has noted that persons who were in Yevteshwarkar-buwa's company could later pass off as learned *gurus* in art music!

Yet another protest was lodged more directly and unambiguously by Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, the key figure in bringing art music within the reach of the common man in the twentieth century. In his presidential address of the Marathi Dramatic Conference he roundly condemned the performers and performances of *Manapaman* (1910) for the harm it brought to art music! It is also known that the most widely recognized merits of the singers were sonority of voice and the ability to reel off fast passages of *taans* which could dazzle the audience into submission! Both these created criteria to judge craftsmanship rather than artistry.

7. Stage-plays harp on (some kind of) realism but stage music is seen to move away and build a universe of its own! Cryptically stated, autonomy and parallel structures are in evidence!

8. It has already been pointed out that stage play embraces prose and is nurtured on dialogues. Curiously stage music is often seen to repeat the prose content and/or comment on the message conveyed through prose (as a channel/mode of expression).

9. Expectedly stage music (as does the art music) tends to employ instruments with a developed musical language of their own.

10. Finally stage music exhibits keen competition of musical and non-musical elements. This competition is inherent, artistic and continued. However set, costume and light designs do not enter the fray with a matching seriousness. When two well-developed arts come together such a contest is inevitable. Further, the competition is mostly decided in favour of one of the arts allowing it a temporary ascendancy. In this manner every time the contest crystallizes into a formal adjustment a genre is created. All particular/individualized musico-theatric forms such as verse play, song play, opera are products of this aesthetic conflict and resolution. A performing and an aesthetic canon need to be noted in this connection. The intrinsic attraction of tonal patterns exceeds that of sound patterns. Further, sound patterns when operating as linguistic signals are more meaningful if not moving!

Chapter 04

THE TERMINOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

In the context of the foregoing discussion it would be instructive to examine some important terms related to the musico-theatric relationship. It is suggested that cultures tend to accept terms which generally reflect the true nature of the reality. However on most occasions, language and terminology (as parts of the scholastic tradition) tend to lag behind the performing tradition. This is especially so when performing traditions are artificially stimulated/modified as a result of a comprehensive confrontation with an alien culture. Under such circumstances the impact-receiving culture has two options open to it: to coin and bring into circulation new terms to suit the altered requirements or to select terms from the available corpus and employ them with reference to the new reality, approximation to the newly desired meaning being the criterion applied. A complication enters when one of the cultures is of a conqueror. In this situation contradictory tendencies are mirrored in the terminology. Some energy is seen to be spent on proving (somehow) that all achievements of the 'foreign' power had their real origin in the indigenous culture! Equally energetic efforts are also made to ape the conqueror and force the existing terminology into a new usage. Both the tendencies are predictable though hardly justifiable. Terminology circulating in a culture without a correspondence of perceptions is to be likened to a dead matter obstructing the flow in an otherwise living organism. Both accepted and rejected terms are indicators of a cultural reality and the phenomenon is to be studied properly. A few related terms are discussed below with this view.

The Term 'Stage'

Stage Lat. stare = to stand. 'A raised platform on which theatrical performances are presented; an area in which actors perform...'

Webster, New Riverside, p. 1129

With the routine definition in mind it is instructive to note that the term came to mean what it means today at least in two phases. During the fourteenth century it merely meant a raised floor or platform but its specific theatric associations found a mention only in the sixteenth century. In fact a scrutiny of the theatric history reveals a three-step evolution. Initially the performing spaces were demarcated on the ground with spectators standing/ sitting around. During the second phase a raised but bare platform became the performing space. It is in

the third phase that the raised platform became an elaborate physical construction designed for the staging of plays. Thus a stage became a structure having a floor with a rake (i.e. a slope in the floor from back wall to footlights), surmounted by flies (i.e. the spaces above the stage, hidden from the audience) and a grid (open framework below the roof) with a cellar below to house the mechanisms to operate traps, etc.

In other words a raised platform designed for the purposes of acting appears late in history. Many important performing procedures related to stage, such as noting stage directions, became well-established practices late in the nineteenth century, a significant corroborative fact. For example compare Shaw and Barrie. While Shaw directs through his stage directions Barrie utilizes them to create a world of myriad impressions. On the other hand Pinter has no directions!

What does the Indian scene offer?

The term to attract attention first is *rangmanch*, a compound of *rang* and *manch*. *Manch* is to grow high or tall and also to shine, to go, to move. The term in itself does not suggest a relationship with the performing arts, but the compound term is not found in standard dictionaries (such as Apte's). On the other hand the term *rang* derived from *ranj* is vital to the performing arts. The term *ranj* has five meanings and if two of them are kept aside ('to hunt a deer' and 'to worship') as archaic, two of remaining three are close to performing arts. One of them refers to the act of colouring, painting while the other speaks of pleasing, gratifying or feeling affection, passion for. Obviously a term denoting a theatric stage has to be created in India and *rangmanch* is the result.

The core meaning of and terminological cluster around *rang* has a wide terminological base in the Indian performing arts. Significantly the total thrust of the cluster or the semantic field covered by it points to theatre and not to drama or stage play as the trinity is explained here. The following listing would reinforce the argument:

Rangh (रंग)	= a stage, theatre, play house, an arena, any place of public amusement
	= the members of an assembly, the audience
	= a field of battle
	= dancing, singing and acting
	= mirth, diversion
	= the nasal modification of a vowel
Compounds, Anganam (अंगनम् /णम्)	= an arena, an amphitheatre

Avataranam (अवतरणम्)	= entrance on the stage
	= an actor's profession
Avatārah or Avatārin (अवतार)	= an actor
Ajīvah (आजीवः)	= an actor, a painter
Upajivin, Upajivikarah Upajivikah (उपजीविन, उपजीविकारः, उपजीविकः)	= a painter
Carah (चरः)	= an actor, a player, a gladiator
Jivakah (जीवकः)	= an actor, a dyer, colourist
Devata (देवता)	= the goddess supposed to preside over battlefield, sports and public diversions generally
Dvāram (द्वारम्)	= a stage-door, the prologue of a play
Pītham (पीठम्)	= a place for dancing
Pradipakah (प्रदीपकः)	= (in music) a kind of measure
Pravesah (प्रवेशः)	= entering the stage engaging in theatrical performances
Bhumih (भूमि)	= a stage, theatre, an arena, a battlefield
Mangalam (मंगलम्)	= a festive ceremony on the stage
Mandapah (मण्डपः)	= a theatre
Malli (मल्ली)	= a lute
Vastu (वस्तु)	= a paint
Vatah (वाटः)	= an arena, a place enclosed for plays, dancing, etc.
Vidya (विद्या)	= the art of dancing and acting, theatrical profession
Śālā (शाला)	= a dancing hall, theatre, playhouse
Sangarah (संगरः)	= a contest on the stage
Two additional terms to be noted are:	
Ranganam (रंगणम्)	= dancing
Rangin (रंगिन्)	= colouring, dyeing attached or devoted to, fond of passionate, impassioned acting on a stage

The term to attract attention next is 'drama'.

Drama = (gk. draō) to do, to make

The term is today understood as a play in prose or verse especially one recounting a serious story.

Dramatic art of a particular kind or period

The art or practice of writing or producing plays

A real-life situation or succession of events having the dramatic progression or emotional content typical of a play

The quality or condition of being dramatic!

These shades of the meaning were more or less stabilized by the beginning of the sixteenth century. More technical work such as the *Oxford Companion to Theatre* has expectedly noted that the term is applied loosely to the whole body of work written for the theatre. It goes on to state that the term is

applicable to any situation in which there is conflict and, for theatrical purposes, resolution of that conflict with the assumption of that character. This implies the co-operation of at least two characters...The dramatic instinct is inherent in man, and the most rudimentary dialogue with song and dance may be classed as drama....

In spite of a certain nebulosity the term suggests a movement towards emotive, coordinated and more direct presentations through persons identified as performers even though the number and variety of the constitutive elements is not highly controlled nor are their contributions precise. This is the reason for the currency and utility of the term 'play'. The terminological cluster around the word play reveals two main shades of significance. The first refers to a certain freedom of movement and action for diversion, skill and entertainment. The other brings to our notice the element of performance or acting for exhibition in a formal situation. The word enjoys itself both as a noun and a verb. The etymological contribution in respect of the term 'play' confirms that the core was to exercise oneself specially by way of diversion. Its connection with theatre was established only in the fourteenth century. It is instructive to note that the word has been possibly derived from 'plein' meaning dance or leap for joy.

I have argued through these pages that it is the second theatric phase which needs to be identified as drama, the proposed Indian equivalent to it being *natya*.

Customarily *natya* is defined as that which is performed by the *natas*, thus making it necessary to examine the latter term. It may, however, be useful to dwell on *natyam* before moving to *nata*. Some specific meanings of the term and the terminological areas formed around it are noteworthy:

नाट्यम्	= dancing, dramatic representation, acting, gesticulation = the science or art of dancing or acting, scenic art = the costume of an actor
नाट्यः	= an actor
SOME COMPOUND TERMS	
नाट्यांगनि	= the ten <i>angas</i> are गेयपद, स्थितपाद्य आसीन, पुष्पमण्डिका, प्रच्छेदक, द्विगूढक, त्रिगूढक, उत्तमोत्तक, उक्तप्रयुक्त, सैन्धव
आगारम्	= a dancing room
आचार्य	= a dancing preceptor
उक्ति	= dramatic phrasing as
धर्मिका, धर्मी	= the rules of dramatic presentation
प्रियः	= an epithet of Shiva
रासकम्	= a kind of play consisting of one act
वेदः	= the science of drama and dancing
वेदी	= a stage, scene
शाला	= a dancing hall, a theatre
शास्त्रम्	= the dramatic science, dramaturgy = a work on dramatic representation

Now to the term *nata* derived from *nata* (*nataki*) 'to dance or to act, to gesticulate, represent dramatically'. Significantly it also means 'to imitate or to copy'. One of the meanings it has acquired through the centuries is 'to injure through a deceptive trick' which again harps on creating situations not in existence! The term also means 'to shine'. It is stated that primarily it refers to a dancer or an actor as also to the son of a degraded *Kshatriya*! The latter description is a pointer to the cultural placement of performers. Some compounds of the term add to the semantic hinterland of the term. Some noteworthy compound terms are:

अन्तिका	= shame, modesty
ईश्वर	= an epithet of Shiva
चर्या	= the performing of an actor
रंगः	= a theatrical stage = anything illusory
वरः	= the chief actor, the <i>Sutradhara</i>
सूत्रम्	= directions or rules for actors

The associated term-cluster is equally informative. Thus *natakh* also means an actor while *natakmelakam* is comedy, a variety of *drishyakavya* with laughter as the main sentiment. Further *natitam* is a representation, acting or gesticulation; *nati* is the chief actress or a courtesan while *natya* means a company of actors.

There clearly exists a strong rationale to equate *natya* with the folk presentation. The inevitability of the dance component also becomes understandable. At the same time *natya* suggests a behaviour pattern narrower in range but artistic in intention and effect than that of *rang* and the associated cluster.

Thus we come to the *natakam*, primarily defined as a play or drama in general. Derived from *nat* discussed earlier, it is further described as the first of the ten principal types of dramatic compositions and has 36 characteristics. It is instructive to know that *natakh* means an actor or a dancer, *natakprapanch* means an arrangement of drama and *natakvidhih* indicates dramatic action. *Natakiya* is 'pertaining to a drama' and *natakiya'* an actress or a dancing girl'. *Nātika*, defined as a short or light comedy, is classified as one of the *uparupakas*. *Nātitakam* is defined as a mimic representation, a gesture, gesticulation. In sum the perusal of the characteristics of *natakam* would indicate that it had very few items similar to those of the modern stage play as brought out earlier. As Levi and others have argued the genre was regarded to be the best of all types prevailing in the Sanskrit tradition. During the British period the performing situation changed, the newly educated were inclined to accept the 'British' model from the Western theatric tradition. The selection and employment of the related theatric terminology was an integral part of the scholastic tradition accompanying the performing practice. To continue to use the term *natak* for the newly accepted theatric form was an easy way out as the term was in circulation and as it had already acquired a prestige even though in reality the two differed considerably in respect of the experience/import.

Finally the pair opera-*sangitikā* needs to be discussed.

Derived from the Latin 'opus' meaning 'labour, work' the term opera is a plural of the former and is customarily defined as a literary or musical work of composition. Further it is explained to be a form of drama in which music is the dominant factor, made up of arias, recitatives, choruses, etc. with orchestral accompaniment, scenery, acting and sometimes dance. The related terminological cluster is as shown below:

Comic opera	= spoken dialogue and happy-ending story
Grand opera	= dramatic composition generally with a serious or tragic theme, of which the plot is elaborated as in a play and the dialogue is set to music throughout

Light opera	= a plot with humorous situations, a happy ending and some spoken dialogue
Bouffe	= a farcical comic opera (French)
Buffa	= a farcical comic opera (Italian)
Comique	= comic opera (French)
Operetta	= a short, humorous opera with dialogue
Operetta glass	= a binocular telescope of small size for use on the theatre
Operetta hat	= a tall hat, the crown of which is extended by springs and is capable of being collapsed into an approximately flat form
Operose	= laborious, also industrious.

The cluster suggests the following salient features of the genre:

- (a) Even though many arts and crafts combine to produce it the opera is dominated by music.
- (b) Dance is regarded as optional
- (c) Proportion of dialogues varies from one sub-genre to the other.
- (d) The most complete version of the form is held to have a tragic import.
- (e) Opera needs a special viewing culture and (according to some) an acquired taste.
- (f) Comic element is added to operatic expression as an afterthought and later in its evolution.
- (g) Opera essentially takes shape as ‘a string of compositions/works’.

A quick look at the Indian scene reveals that the term *sangitikā* is a neologism. The term *sangitikā* was in use but the contextual, presentational, historical and cultural antecedents and prevalents proved less conducive. In fact in the new age the term is taken to mean a small opera, an operetta. As Mathur and others have pointed out the word *sangitikā* finds mention from Vararuchi (500 A.D.) onwards but *Sangeet Damodara* by Shubhankara (1500 A.D.) appears to be the first to define it.

Mr. J.C. Mathur has pertinently noted that the only item (of theatric importance) not covered by the definition is the dialogue in prose. He also adds that to some extent this was compensated for by the regional traditions in Mithila, Nepal, Assam, etc. However it needs to be stated that the entire expression in these traditions was permeated with devotional cult content combined with the regional variations.

Chapter 05

THE INDIAN PARALLELOGRAM

The foregoing analysis, it is hoped, has prepared the ground successfully to arrive at certain aesthetic and cultural conclusions. These should interest theoreticians as well as performers. In the performing arts no aesthetic conclusions are imaginable without a reference to the performing (as distinct from a scholastic) tradition and therefore the conclusions can lay claims to a performing, i.e. a creative future and relevance. In my opinion the contemporary musico-theatric presentations would become better directed, purposeful and vitally aesthetic if our attraction for the composite operates with less conceptual confusion.

During the modern period, especially after the confrontation with the British, the musico-theatric scene reveals that multiple and diverse cultural forces were triggered off. They succeeded notably in touching life areas other than political, economic, administrative, etc. in different parts of the country at different time points. Over a period two dichotomies were gradually forced on the Indian mind: Hindu-Muslim and the Occidental-Oriental. I submit that isms and attitudes emanating from these forces influenced the size and shape of a cultural parallelogram which emerged in modern India. A number of new features of the performing arts or alterations introduced in some of their original features and the patterns of the associated scholastic behaviours make sense when the parallelogram is taken into consideration. An immediately relevant fact is that the Marathi, Gujarati, Parsi and Bengali stage traditions present cases in which a hard struggle to introduce changes in the prevalent musico-theatric equations and yet to preserve their own genius is evident. It is to be put on record that even though all the four stage traditions alluded to the Western musico-theatric equation, i.e. the opera with a varying intensity; none followed the model in substance! This cultural double speak is traceable to many cultural and musical factors. It could be briefly stated that the Parsi-Hindi/Parsi-Gujarati revolved around a model aptly described as the Indrasabha prototype and the attempt reflected an operatic intention. The Bengali tradition preferred an updated version of *jatra* and hence generally followed the devotional musico-dramatic format. The Gujaratis evolved a processed version of their own folk drama while the Marathi stream opted for the music play which, in my opinion, proved more durable for the reasons discussed later. The reluctance to create musico-theatric presentations operatic in spirit as well as letter of the form and the lure felt for it, exemplify a strange-looking ambivalence usually tackled by cultural musicology than art history, musicology or such other disciplines. In this context some observations become pertinent.

1. The musico-theatric combinations selected by the Indian psyche were closer to the idea of a music play than that of an opera. The reasons are to be found basically in the nature of theatre and music accepted as such in Indian culture. Picking up the threads of the earlier discussion it would mean that the kind of compositeness acceptable to our aesthetic endeavours was responsible in the main for the preference to the music play.

2. In spite of a little simplification it could be stated that in situations of cultural confrontation-assimilation the performing arts respond through a creation of paradoxical prototypes. These prototypes are chiefly distinguished on the one hand by their recognizable acceptance of a new terminology (inclusive of nomenclature) borrowed from an alien culture and an equally noticeable persistence in evolving performance formulae thrown up by the indigenous culture. During the British period Indian musico-theatric impulse incessantly referred to the opera though it finally settled on a form describable as music play.

3. The Indian preference for music plays was and still is governed by the comparative lack of legitimacy accorded to dance (understood as an apotheosis of movement). Secondly, music has been given the highest place, interpreting the art as the ultimate in evocative sound. Finally, of relatively recent origin is the sanctification of the written word as the acme of meaningfulness. These were the factors contributing to the low rating dance received at the aesthetic level though at the performing level it was employed with more than tolerance. It also explains that *raga* music was perseveringly used by virtue of the readymade framework of effective utterance it offered. The ascendancy enjoyed by the intellectually conceived and stylized written word over its wide-ranging oral avatars was also an outcome of the same circumstances.

4. The music play resulted from the seemingly contradictory role which nationalistic feelings played in performing arts. On the one hand there was a craving to prove to the Western world (which in the Indian eyes meant the English-speaking) that Indian music and musicians could do everything that their Western counterparts were capable of. It was also simultaneously averred that the unparalleled ancientness and the intrinsic complexity of Indian music needed protection from the alien, contaminating influence! It is easy to see how both the sentiments were nationalist in essence!

5. The nationalist sentiment combined powerfully with the essential ambiguity of music to create a side effect. Music plays could become a voice of protest against the foreign rule and yet avoid a crushing reprisal! Allegory and music thus joined forces to generate undefinable but pervasive waves of hostility. The accumulated resentment of the masses, i.e. the target audiences of the music plays thereby found cathartic expression. Instances of music plays banned for

their agitational achievements or potential have been listed elsewhere in this monograph.

6. The general Indian attitude to women is also linked with the Indian adoption of the music play format. Firstly, woman as an independent entertainer was not 'openly' accepted. It is educative to note that the Indian view of theatre has been hero-centred. The three types of married heroines and the eight unmarried are all defined with reference to the four varieties of the hero with *dheer* as the common quality! However, male impersonation was accepted! And yet dancing males were not generally available in the country. Secondly singing was regarded less effeminate than dancing. Therefore music plays without women and sans dancing males became widely prevalent (the exception was perhaps the Parsi tradition and the Indrasabha model it pursued). The prohibition on women as active and public entertainers (outside certain identified classes and castes) has been traced to Islamic influences by Levi.

7. One may modify Tocqueville's perceptive comment on drama and maintain that a stage play provides the first expression of the aristocratic longing for democracy. In other words aristocracy feels the need of a representational outlet for the philosophical attraction felt for certain economic, social and political ideas. However the real message of the ideas can hardly be expected to be entirely palatable to the classes concerned! As a result the play with music is employed, the latter providing services of a non-representational diluter!

8. In the nineteenth century two newly created classes to be severed from the traditional rural and religious moorings, were the newly educated middle class and the working class. As a consequence the music drama became a closed avenue. Music play offered a viable, secular and an urban substitute for the people deprived of a specific composite expression, i.e. music drama. This is the reason why a thematic examination of the music-plays reveals their gradual thematic shift from religious to mythological and from historical to social. Irrespective of the changing thematic centre the music however retained its hold.

9. A related feature was the loss of the devotional modes of music-making on account of the changing social pattern. From the five categories art music posed difficulties in music-making because of the inherent and strong grammatical structure. However its artistic excellence continued to attract. Under the circumstances music play supplied an intermediate position gratefully accepted by the music-makers and receivers. The genius of the people was seeking music of excellence but also a music with a wider appeal and hence the crystallization of stage music. It is symptomatic that very often the classicists fulminated against stage-music for the noticeable weakening of classical content! In the earlier periods of Indian cultural history devotional music has provided a

middle-ground between the elite art and the rural folk corpus. Stage music of the nineteenth century carried out the same task.

10. The aesthetic and musical gains made possible by the music play format make an impressive listing.

Stage music, it must be admitted, created a new type of vocalism. A voice production midway between the non-elite (i.e. folk and devotional) and the craft-oriented art tradition came into vogue. It also commendably facilitated circulation of musical idioms, forms and styles. A strategy of transplanting tunes from one language tradition to the other gained acceptance. A freer exchange between the Carnatic and Hindustani systems also took place. More compact musical moulds were firmly established and they forced a reluctant retreat on the dry, repetitious and rigid music-making of the art musicians! Stage music also invested folk forms with a new respectability and weaned away many from some debased forms of entertainment in the popular-cum-folk category.

11. While borrowing and assimilating various features from the elite and the non-elite traditions stage music took care to keep the musical idea and its elaboration at the centre. Actor-singers in stage music expression can therefore elaborate musical ideas. It is symptomatic that (in Marathi stage music for instance) stage songs can form part of the concert repertoire even when the art musician is *not* an actor-singer. In other words stage songs can be treated as any other art music composition, independent of any theatric setting.

12. Finally it needs to be emphasized that music plays covered the widest possible range on the speech-music continuum. Beginning from informative speech, music plays reached music through the intervening (though optional) phases of the dramatic-lyrical-recited and the sung. In the process it developed speech patterns, making a smooth transition from prose to music. The stylistic moulds crystallized and consolidated by the music play were so effective that the Indian films thought it wise to employ the same for a long time! Communicators in a predominantly oral tradition evolve efficient speech forms over a period of centuries. It is a tragic waste to allow them to fall into disuse through a mechanical reliance on the printed word! The music play tried its valiant best to keep in circulation a wide variety of speech forms.

Chapter 06

THE INDIAN 'NO' TO OPERA

It is clear that in spite of the terminological shadowing, partially assimilated external mechanisms, occasional approximation to the presentational format, eager use of nomenclature and some recourse to music-making devices traceable to the operatic traditions, India registered (and does so even today to a great extent) a firm 'No' to opera. Some important reasons are noted below.

1. A very primary condition for the emergence of operatic expression is the complete dominance of music, the composers in the initial phases and the actor-singers, instrumentalists as music-makers later. Other arts and crafts have a role to play in operatic ventures but only on the terms offered by music. To use Eliot's well-known formulation all non-musical stimuli must find their musical correlates to be admitted to operatic presentations.

Conditions in India did not allow music complete sway. For example even the Parsi-Hindi tradition (which for all practical purposes appeared to be the most operatic) finally settled on procedures conducive to dominance of the word. Master Fida Hussain has noted that while the Indersabha model of Kaisarbagh, Lucknow (in 1854) allowed the Ustads and the Khansahebs to provide the tunes for a later versification, (he mentions plays such as *Allauddin*, *Gulbakawali*, *Phasane Azad*, *Laila Majnu*, etc. in this connection) Aga Hashr, Munshi Betab, Hari Krishna Janhar arrived on the scene to reverse the situation. Fida Hussain asserts that only songs which are written before being set to tune become popular.⁵¹

It has been recorded that before Aga Hashr began his dramatic reign the entire proceedings were song-oriented. We are also told that well-established musical forms were pressed into theatric presentations. For example a hero's love would be declared in a *ghazal* and the heroine would respond with a *thumri*!⁵² Talib in 1884 said that the Parsi tradition relied heavily on music *a la* opera because Lucknow, a main operating ground of the tradition, had accorded supremacy to music.

On the other hand music-makers of the Marathi stage music tradition frequently insisted on the priority of tunes over versification.

⁵¹ *Master Fida Hussain: Parsi Theatremen Pachas Varsha*, edited by Pratibha Agrawal, Natya Shodh Sansthan, Calcutta, 1986, p. 15.

⁵² *Parsi Hindi Rangmanch*, op. cit., p. 65.

2. Opera as a genre traverses wide ranges between movement and dance, sound signal and literature, heard sound and music, occupied space and sculpture and finally between visual stimulus and painting. The genre strikes roots and prospers to the extent a culture allows simultaneous use of these five avenues of expression towards representational manifestations. It is known that the Indian psyche has been traditionally reluctant to explore the representational as opposed to the symbolic. Indian cultural history also notes that realism arrived late in visual, performing, literary and the composite arts. The main force responsible for realism as a philosophy of arts is directly related to the new education which came in vogue under the British rule. For reasons that find place in cultural musicology, Indian music was inherently resistant to philosophies and strategies of realism and representationalism. On the other hand, realism could make some headway in dance, visual arts and literature during the British period, exploring gross or subtle levels, depending on the mind, moment and the milieu concerned.

3. Opera consists of all kinds of significances, e.g. literary, visual, mimetic, etc. These can hardly be realized in a stage performance unless an adequate variety of instrumental colour is available. It must be admitted that presentations of Indian music lack in tonal colour. Firstly, because instruments capable of wide pitch ranges, volume gradations and timbre spectra are scarce. Secondly, the principles of tonality and relative pitch have brought about a vocal expression which remains weak in colour. Tonal colour can make perceivable the representational as well as the symbolic by exploring the vast area between the too obvious onomatopoeic uses of sound to employment of the subtler, associative shades. Personalities and events, processes and ideas become identifiable when a successful tie-up with a suitable timbre is achieved. The utility of such a strategy to forge plots, channelize narratives, create and fill spaces created by incidents, link episodes can hardly be overestimated. Generally speaking, smooth and yet recognizable movement can be made to minor high points of action as well as to the climaxes with the help of tonal colour.

4. Two fundamental features of Indian music (related to the principles of tonality and relative pitch) are its melodic construction and a solo mode of presentation. An operatic expression however requires musical streams moving parallel to the manifold currents of the dramatic action. In other words part-writing, harmonization, syncopation and other musical procedures such as counterpoint prove especially conducive to the dramatic representation operatic in character. Concerted singing or playing of instruments can hardly replace choral or orchestral music-making. A concerted singing/playing may at the most compensate for the lack of 'body' which Indian musical sound otherwise suffers from, but it cannot be expected to achieve the variety of direction in tonal phrasings. A melodic and solo music-making proves more effective for isolated

emotional states of individual joy or suffering but not to depict impressively the social (as distinct from personal), collective (as opposed to individual) and expansive (as distinguished from intensive) experience. This is not to suggest that one cannot do without harmonization, etc. What is indicated is the intrinsic suitability of certain music-making strategies for expressing certain states of feeling and emotional forms.

5. While discussing the causes leading to the Indian 'No' to opera it is also necessary to mention the primacy of vocal music in India and the high regard for *raga* and *tala* as principles of organizing the tonal and rhythmic material respectively. Given the limitations of human voice (and the relative scarcity of instruments), the adherence to *raga-tala* logic practically predetermined the musico-theatric response in India. Thus music became song-oriented and the play opted for an episodic construction. A song appearing in a musico-theatric setting had to employ language because both drama and play allowed scope to language and literary forms. Consequently a pairing of dialogue and song became a regular structural feature. Such coupling, however, virtually eliminates the possibility of a continuous sway of music, a ruling condition in operatic expressions. The Indian way of voice production, the exhaustive array of musical forms which had been stabilized by the late eighteenth century and the (borrowed) stage phase combined to create the new musico-theatric genre namely music play (and *not* opera). The situation could be summed up in the following manner:

i) Operatic music-making was found to be generally less conducive to the Indian musico-theatric expression even though Parsi and Gujarati traditions in particular attempted to use some 'operatic' features.

ii) A very large portion of the operatic music-making though well explored and immediately popular could not prove durable in India. Under this description falls all music associated with comic situations. It seems that Indian music is more serious and the Indian mind takes deep impressions of only 'serious' music. In this connection it is instructive to note that the element of the comic, i.e. *hasya*, is mentioned by both Bharata and Dhananjay as manifest through *vachicka*, *aharya* and *angika*, and music is not specifically mentioned. Music is rarely made fun of (except in *Mrichhakatika*).

iii) Dance and dance-associated music, a significant part of the operatic musical corpus, could not find an easy entry in Indian stage play because dance was accorded a lowly social and musical status. It is worth noting that the Parsi and Gujarati traditions were more inclined to allow scope to dance.⁵³

⁵³ Ibid., p. 48.

iv) The Marathi and, to some extent, Bengali traditions preferred musical items which could be elaborated further and placed subsequently in concert situations indicating thereby an independent existence of the musical pieces enjoyed irrespective of the dramatic contexts.

6. A very important matter to be considered is the possibility of employing music to describe, to narrate or to depict. Both the operatic and the Indian musico-theatric traditions seem to deal with myth, history and romance. However there is a vital difference between the two traditions (which persists even today). The Western operatic tradition could rely on the idea and operations of programme music, a concept (and a strategy) which enabled music-makers to provide acceptable and broadly recognizable musical correlates to a descriptive/narrative content. Through the operations of programme music a bridge is built between a representational activity and (the essentially non-representational category of) art music. Consequently in an opera the bonds between music and literature on the one hand, and linkage between music and action on the other, become somewhat real (however loose or indefinite might be the connections between scenes, incidents, moods and the associated music). This was not possible in Indian contexts - at least not in the same mode. In India the thematic content was elaborately stated via literary modes and as a result the closest parallel structures were available in art music alone.

7. In the final analysis an opera becomes possible because a composer is allowed to have a decisive authority with the poet playing the second fiddle! The ultimate content is fashioned in terms of music (and not of literature). Irrespective of the frequently stated position inter-arts relationship are Orwellian in combined presentations and some arts enjoy the status of being more equal than others! In India the musico-theatric combinations are shaped by the poets, i.e. playwrights. On most of the occasions the literary component makes a statement, records information and creates situation and music is asked to emphasize, repeat and provide a vague emotional ambience. It is true that instances of the poets being asked to write for a tune already selected are not lacking, but such occasions indicate a falling back on the *rasa* theory, in itself a literature-based formulation. Finally it is symptomatic that the inherited musicological position in India regarded a poet writing for a pre-selected tune as inferior! He was described as a *kuttikar*.

8. The arguments advanced are intended to suggest that India's 'No' to opera was not an entirely aesthetic strategy chosen in order to face a new musico-theatric situation. In fact the 'no' seems to have provided a cultural escape route!

It must be appreciated that changes taking place in the non-musical areas of Indian life were causing new anxieties, creating vigorous deviations and generating enthusiastic responses - all intended to shape new behaviour patterns. To find musico-theatric correlates to such factors would have required a total as well as an abrupt change at the submerged, deeper levels of the societal psyche. A forced change causes more suffering and losses because the receiver is not ready to receive. The truth is that coping strategies of a society tend to rely on conservative elements in the performing arts to supply a buffer and a transition phase while other sectors of life are churned to their depths! This is specially so in the non-representational categories and forms in music. It may be said that a change in music marks a state of readiness to accept the most comprehensive cultural changes. The first century of British rule in India was a period when the Indian psyche was reeling under the impact of a total assault on its sensibilities. Holding to indigenous models in the performing arts is a way to maintain a 'still point in the turning world', to borrow from Eliot. Opera was therefore a desirable impossibility and music play was the required and viable alternative because the musico-theatric equations thus struck provided basis to a society trying to attain a new equilibrium.

9. In the final analysis the Indian 'No' to Western opera indicated failure to accept two basic premises: firstly to believe that music can be everything in a musico-theatric performance and secondly to think it legitimate to de-sanctify music, to pave the way for generating musical resources designed to express anything. It is to be noted that a number of facets of normal/day-to-day lives in India were eliminated from the musico-theatric endeavours because of the concept of sublimity of music and the *rasa* framework.

Chapter 07

A POSTSCRIPT

Ottovio Rinuccini (1562–1621) published his librettos of *Daphne* and *Eurydice* to claim the honour of being the first librettist in the opera tradition. At that time he argued that the ancient Greek tragedies could be sung in their entirety while contemporary music was too weak to achieve the feat. He also temptingly suggested that only ‘cultured’ persons could hope to emulate the feat ‘even today’! When Peri set *Daphne* to music (1597) and a little later *Eurydice* (1600), the music composed was a result of some research aimed at reconstructing the original/authentic Greek music. Some details from this series of events are worth noting.

- (1) The patronage offered and invited was feudal and courtly. The artist was a ‘dependent’.
- (2) The Orpheus myth represented an attempt of an artist (and a composer at that) to restore order in anarchic conditions.
- (3) Music employed for the purpose was ‘classical’ which in brief would mean older and more ordered.
- (4) The poet and the composer were different.

As if to emphasize the important roles of musician-composers, Monteverdi (1567-1643) as well as Gluck (1714-1787) returned to the Orpheus theme in the two succeeding centuries. Even in the nineteenth century the Wagnerian revolution had the musician in central position both in *Tanhauser* and *Meistersinger*.

A brief glance at the Indian scene reveals that Rai Ramanand, prince of Rajmahendri, was the first to use the term sangeet natak. Ramanand was a vassal to Prataprudra of Orissa (1497-1540). The latter was a disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who belonged to the tradition of saint-poets in India. The saint-poets invariably sought answers to cultural anarchy in a devotionism replete with music. Ramanand's work was known as *Jagannathvallabha*. However this is comparatively speaking an old tale. The later and living traditions of the *sangeet natak* in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada as well as Sanskrit, date from the seventeenth century. The entire area in which these language traditions functioned was repeatedly if not continuously criss-crossed by the volatile armies of the Marathas, British, French, Portuguese as well as those of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan. Musico-theatric works mentioned during the period are *Ramnatakam* (Arunachal Kaviray), *Prahlad Bhakta Vijayam* and *Nauka*

Charitram (Thyagaraja) as well as *Nandhar Charitram* (Gopalkrishna Bharatiyar). Once again some items attract our attention: (1) the use of myths; (2) employment of music in the well-entrenched traditions of ‘classical’ music; (3) the royal patronage.

In this context it would not be surprising to note what happened in Heramba Mahal of the Raja of Sangli, a small princely court in south Maharashtra. In 1843 Bhave gave a performance of a music play called *Sita Swayamvara*. It is to be specifically noted that apart from using a mythological subject the venture was also characterized by *ragiyati* music, direct royal inspiration and ‘the commonality of the composer-librettist’ to use the operatic terminology.

A reference to the inter-relationship between music and cultural confrontation is in order. A society suffering from cultural humiliation invariably carries on a search for dependable (cultural) supports to hold its head high. Isolated ideas or facts as well as philosophical traditions, etc. are usually brought into the picture. Music, in particular, with its capacity to be abstract as well as absolute remains free from the constraints of the mundane, day-to-day world. Hence musical traditions appear to be closer to the cultural foundations of the society involved. Music is the last to undergo changes in cultural upheavals. Plato perceptively concluded that change of music meant anarchy. Further between new melodic and rhythmic patterns he was critical of the latter. He opined that while tones are persuasive, rhythms are compulsive. He issued a warning against change in rhythms!

It is interesting that the pre-Bhave musico-theatric performances were described with the help of the nearly onomatopoeic terms *allll-durrr* and *tagad thom!* The former alludes to the demon's cries and the latter represents rhythm syllables employed by the *mridang* player! Bhave not only employed *raga* tunes and more regular rhythms but he also created a *sutradhar* who sang all the songs and controlled movements of all characters. It is significant that Bhave was also a puppeteer! Once again we see the artist trying to impose an order on the prevailing disorder comes to the fore! When Bhave saw performances of an English play in Bombay in 1853 he felt compelled to imitate it in matters of sets, costumes and other external features of the staging but not in respect of music! As later commentators have stated Bhave's dialogues, stories and the repeated wars between Gods and demons in reality sound notes of protest against the foreign rulers and indicate sympathy towards the nebulous aspirations of the silent populace. Was music felt to be a safe and sure way of giving vent to the seething discontent, as yet unformed and unfocussed?

Monteverdi presented a shorter version of *Orpheo* (1607) to be followed by a complete one in 1609. Alessandro Striggio was the librettist. But the vital difference was the accepted ascendancy of the composer. The poet was to

submit to the composer's wishes. Monteverdi asserted that distortion in the poet's work was legitimate when the pace and internal dynamics of music so demanded! His use of rhythmic declamation (recitative) was so skilful and daring that he is credited to have nearly invented it! His composing strategy was to treat each word in a sentence as a separable unit worthy of musical rendering for emotional expression. Sentence as a structure, language as having a pace of its own - he chose to disregard! He reasoned that logic, thought and concerns of the individual are 'prose' functions! On the other hand his belief was that the irrational, emotional and the societal unconscious with its sorrows, sufferings and dilemmas needed music as an outlet. When meaning was thrust back and music came to the forefront with voice and orchestra to help, the audience was noticeably startled because so far it used to receive a straight and linear message through language composed as prose! Now the sentence was disintegrating to make the meaning thinner while music stirred its minds with undecipherable significances. In addition Monteverdi used another rather disquieting device. While the singer was rendering the isolated word non-musically the orchestra went on weaving its harmonic webs continuously. *Orpheo* signified that the human voice was the will power, orchestral progressions were the system or the Establishment and recitative was the wailing of the human mind suffocated by sorrow! Everything takes place in music. Whatever is worth stating is stated by music. Monteverdi has been described variously as a pessimist, a fatalist or a believer! It is not given to human beings or to artists to ultimately banish suffering. Only fate or divine forces can do so is Monteverdi's conclusion. *Orpheo* has been described in two ways:

His (Monteverdi) interpretation of the myth reveals a fine mind of a pessimistic culture.

Orpheo represents a musical conquest of the territory of meanings.

When musico-theatric flowerings from various cultures are juxtaposed in greater detail the seeming contradiction of the Indian references to opera and the actual non-operatic practice tends to disappear. The omnipresent descriptions of the musico-theatric performances as 'opera' and the complete non-inclusion of the major operatic features - the desire to welcome and assimilate comprehensive cultural changes and yet to hold to music and other non-representational aspects of Indian culture - all come together to suggest unconscious but fruitful choices made by a culture at crossroads. The cultural wisdom appears to state emphatically that no drama can change unless its parent culture changes and that no cultural changes can be described as dramatic!

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