

### 3. Democracy and Creative Music

These are days when the taste for music has spread far and wide and people in general hunger for the particular form of enjoyment which music gives. While this is a healthy sign from one stand-point it may not be altogether an unmixed blessing if viewed from a different angle. One of the most effective expressions of the soul of a nation is through her music and when there is a general renaissance in the life of a nation this is evidenced also in her musical expression.

Music (as well as other fine arts) was in the past a privilege of a chosen few; kings, zemindars and rich people patronised music and musicians. The musician had no anxiety about his livelihood. He was free to pursue his art and keep it pure and high, irrespective of the demands of the people. It was, as it were, only by sufferance that the masses had occasion to listen to these masters. But all that has now changed. As with many other things music also has passed on from the hands of the aristocratic few to the general mass. Music Sabhas and other similar organisations have made it possible for the man in the street to enjoy music as much and as heartily as the zemindars or maharajas of old. Musicians are much in demand and one may say their needs in life are assured, at least in most cases.

But — and it is a big “but” — what is the effect of this democratisation on the art of music? Now the patronage has shifted from the few to the many. The average musician of to-day cannot entirely depend upon the patronage

of the aristocracy. He looks for his support to the people at large, and so has to keep them in good humour. The result is obvious. However intense and sincere the desire of the public for encouraging music may be, the moment the standard of high class music is left entirely to be determined by the mass of hearers, the art is bound to deteriorate. An honest musician, who on the one hand desires to be true to the ideals of traditional Indian Music and on the other wishes to please the hearers has to live a life of compromise between the ideals and the actual necessities of life. After all, one may ask, can the public claim to have the vision and inner equipment, that power of grasping the subtleties of our musical system, necessary to lay down the law for the Vidwans? The answer cannot but be unanimous. There are certain things in life, not of the material of mundane variety, which can only be appreciated from a distance in a general way by the mass; it is given only to a few to get at the inner vital centre of an art system and assimilate and reveal its meaning to the public at large. And so music lovers and those who are interested in keeping our musical system pure and unimpaired owe a duty to meet this problem in the face and find a solution.

Another aspect of the matter which has also to be considered is this. We have plenty of artists, some of them in the top rank. They sing well and to the proper standard and people also appreciate them in a way. But are we having many *creative* artists in the true sense of the word? One of the striking features of our music is that while it is apparently hemmed in on all sides by rules and regulations it is at the same time so elastic, so full of possibilities of improvement, and so remarkably capable of *Mano-dharma* (creative improvisation). To quote Leopold Stokowki, "While giving due consideration to tradition stemming from the past, Indian Music is free and improvised, so that all powers of imagination in the musician are

brought into play. In this way the music of India is always creative, never a mere reproduction of what is written or played". But how many of our professionals can claim to be truly creative in this sense? I am afraid not many. On the other hand some of them, even at the top of the profession, lack the necessary general culture so indispensable to a creative artist. They show a tendency to go along the line of least resistance and condemn all creative attempts as spurious or heterodox. This is a natural tendency, but in the wider interest of the art we have to guard ourselves against it, especially in Southern India where unfortunately few of the professionals at the top happen to possess high cultural attainment and so they convert a plastic and overgrowing art into a rigid intellectual system. This danger is a real factor to count. But I believe that the soul of India is not dead, however sluggish her pulse beats may be in certain departments of her cultural expression. She will see to it that her musical art, which is the pride of the world, continues to maintain its position unaffected by any of the onslaughts which are made on many of her cultural expressions.