

9. Folk Music

Folk music of a nation is a natural expression of the mass soul of the people making the nation. In fact any national art is or at any rate ought to be a true expression of the cultural soul of the nation. And music being the highest of the fine arts is the best and most vital expression of the nation's soul. While the higher and more elaborate musical expressions correspond to the higher and more intellectual section of the people, folk music expresses effectively and in simple, direct and straight-forward

manner the emotional experience of the general population. I have heard it said by people who have travelled wide that, while there are appreciable differences between the various kinds of musical technique obtaining in different parts of the world, there is a sort of similarity in folk music all over the world. This is but natural as the basic emotional impulses of humanity are similar all the world over. It is only in the sophisticated conventional society that a lot of artificial differences become manifest.

In India especially, where music has played an important part in the day to day life of the nation, folk music is inextricably woven into the life of the people. Indian people are essentially a musical people. They use music for almost every function in life; whether it is a religious ceremony or a social function or an agricultural pursuit they won't hesitate to use music to lighten their hearts and make their burden less heavy. They have a song for harvest, another for lifting water, and yet a third for loading a van and so on. In temples and on marriage occasions music is an indispensable factor.

A train-motor collision occurs in the morning; by noon the incident is set to music and printed as a leaflet, and in the afternoon it is sold in the trains and buses. This is a common phenomenon in South India. Music runs in our blood.

Here in India music has always been recognised as the handmaid of religion and a help for the realisation of the Supreme. In such a country it is no wonder that music is used freely for every possible purpose. I am now concerned with the type of music which we come across in villages, in the paddy fields, in work houses and so on.

Several varieties of these folk songs are found all over South India, especially in the Tamil Districts. The most important of these are Kummi, Thambangu, Tappan,

Lavani and Chindu, with its varieties like Vazhinadachinthu, Nondichinthu, Kavadichinthu, etc. Of these the Kavadichinthu (so called on account of its association with the carrying of Kavadi by the devotees on their shoulders) has attained a high degree of importance among the folk songs for various reasons. It has an intrinsic musical charm of its own; it depicts the universal longing of the human soul for union with the object of its devotion, the Nayaka-Nayaki bhava, bhakti which is the background of all devotional literature—the deity in this case being Lord Subrahmanya, the most popular Deity in Tamil Nad. (Tradition has it that it was Lord Subrahmanya who gave us the *mūttamil*, Iyal, Isai and Nataka (literature, music and dance-drama).

Annamalai Reddiar—blessed be his memory—the famous author of Kavadichindu, has laid Tamil Nad under a deep debt of obligation by his great gift of the Kavadichindu which is classical in its theme, diction and rendering. There is no Tamilian heart which does not throb in response to his chindus.

There are also other varieties of folk-songs which convey moral lessons and expound philosophical truths, teach proverbs and narrate historical events, and so on.

Kerala is remarkably rich in the variety of folk songs, Malayalam boat song—Vanchipattu as it is called—is a speciality of the land.

One striking fact which emerges from a study of the folk-songs is that, while the tunes may not conform to the rules of Lakshana, they are not lacking in aesthetic quality; on the other hand it would look as if their very charm and appeal are the result of this apparent disregard of the requirements of technique.