

5. Aesthetics of Rhythm or Laya Bhava

It has been said that Laya is the father and Shruti is the mother of music. There is a great truth behind this. While it is true that a mother tends and nourishes a child there is the danger of the child growing undisciplined and the father is supposed to supply this necessary element of

guiding and directing the activities of the child so that maximum effect can be achieved with minimum effort. This discipline makes all the difference not only in Music but in everything in life. The difference between undisciplined music and disciplined music is somewhat of the nature of the difference between a wild forest and a well-kept garden. By proper discipline, pruning and trimming, what otherwise would have been merely a wild growth of nature is converted into a beautiful and attractive garden. This is exactly what Laya (Tala) does in regard to our Music.

I do not know whether in any other system of music in the world the Laya aspect plays such an important part as in Carnatic Music. It looks as if the South Indian mind revels in the intricacies of time measure. This matter has been gone into thoroughly by ancients. We hear of the 7 major talas, then the 35 talas, 175 talas, 108, 120 and so on; all these were developed on the basis of certain definite rules. In addition to all these kinds of time measures, Shri Arunagiri Nathar has, in his famous 'Tirupugazh', introduced new varieties not covered by any of the ancient schemes. Even now, we cannot say that one cannot improvise new kinds and compose pieces in these new varieties—the scope is almost unlimited. Many of these talas have not only an academic interest but are in actual use and people in South India have grown to appreciate and enjoy them at least intellectually, if not entirely aesthetically.

This leads us to the question of the two kinds of appeal in our music, the purely aesthetic and the intellectual. Of course, music being the Queen of the Fine Arts is essentially related to our emotions. The appeal of any Fine Art is primarily to our emotions and only secondarily to our intellect. Our ancient scholars have recognised this speciality of our Music and in classifying knowledge as 'Vidya' and 'Kala' have placed Music under both these categories;

and Music, according to them, was both a Science and an Art in the general sense of the words. Of course, this intellectual appeal of music is not entirely related to the pure rational faculty in us. There is a tinge of emotion about this intellectual appeal. So also for the aesthetic appeal there is some sort of an intellectual background. Emotion in essence is not merely desire but is feeling stabilised by a touch of intellection, and so when we speak of the appeal of Music being essentially emotional there is an implication of also an element of intellectual appeal involved. This is specially true of Carnatic music. The tala aspect referred to above to some extent supplies this intellectual appeal, though it is possible to conceive the possibility of Tala alone being capable of emotional reaction.

Tala is in essence based on measurement of time. So Tala, Laya or Rhythm serves the purposes of regulating, guiding and disciplining Music with a view to enhance the aesthetic appeal. As we know, all the phenomena in the world can ultimately be reduced to vibrations and the effect of vibrations and their power to cause unexpected results have been recognised. By drawing a violin bow across the edge of a glass tumbler in a particular manner, one can break the tumbler into pieces. We might have heard also of the practice of a marching body of soldiers breaking their steps when they cross a bridge. It is known that in certain cases if the periodicity of their steps has a particular value, the tread of the soldiers can break the bridge. We may also in this connection remember our ancient belief that by *Mantras* properly chosen and intoned correctly we can produce wonderful results. Bringing rain by prayer is an example. It is said of the Raga Dipak that it can produce fire and so also the Megha Ranjani Raga can cause rain. So we find in Nature periodicity is of great importance. Here we can see the importance of Rhythm. It is a matter of long experience that a sound regularly repeated tends

one to sleep. A lullaby quietens a restless child, even the rhythmic sound of a moving train lulls some people to slumber.

\ The effect of Rhythm on our inner nature is not so well recognized as it ought to be. There is as much Laya Bhava as Raga Bhava. By changing Rhythm we can change the aesthetic appeal of a piece of music. Why, even a change of tempo can cause variations in the aesthetic appeal, hence the importance of what is called *Kala Pramana*. The time measure and the tempo have to be chosen to suit the particular piece, its wording, its sense, the Raga in which it is sung, the instrument on which it is played, the quality of the voice that sings and so forth. It is well known that the same piece, which when played on Veena has to be somewhat drawn out, loses its effect on the flute unless the tempo is altered. So also in the case of some human voices the tempo has to be lowered to bring out desired effect. Each singer and instrumentalist has to choose the proper *Kala Pramana* to produce the best aesthetic effect of the piece of music sung or played. This point does not seem to receive the attention which it deserves.

In Dance, this rhythmic aspect is of paramount importance. In the mere grouping of various rhythmic patterns lies the unlimited possibility of producing various kinds of aesthetic appeal. It is well known that a dancer indicates a time measure with his (or her) feet, then he (or she) often changes the pattern and the effect is marvellous. We feel thrilled by the sheer beauty of the change of rhythm pattern; (for example, when the foot is marking the *Adi tala* with the *jati thakadhimi-thari-kita*, he suddenly changes the pattern to *thakita-thakita-thaka* and the effect is remarkable). I am not now referring to the *Abhinaya* aspect of Dance where facial expressions and *Mudras* play a prominent part. In the other items of a Dance recital where emphasis is laid upon Rhythm, a study of the

emotional effects of various rhythm patterns and frequent changes of the pattern within a given tala mould is of great importance.