

## **7. Aesthetic Sublimation in Music**

The function of true art is to interpret for us the Divine through His manifestations. An artist, if he be true to his calling, should in every piece of his work, painting, poetry, sculpture, architecture, music, etc., give us some idea of God-head behind the manifested Universe. He interprets for us God in a way slightly different from that of religion (so called), philosophy, science and so on.

A human being responds to the outer world in a number of ways. The objective world first touches his physical nature. There are also the emotional and mental reactions. Behind these, there is another deeper nature in him which also can be stimulated and made to respond to outer impacts, provided the impacts are of the proper kind. The mere physical contact gives us a sense of comfort or discomfort. The emotional and mental reactions are pleasant or unpleasant. But the response from the still higher aspect of the human nature enables us to rise to a condition of sublimated aesthetic awareness where dualities seem to fade away altogether.

All this is certainly true of music. Through the medium of sound touching our physical tympanum, our emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects are affected. There is first the physical reaction and certain combinations of sounds produce merely physical reaction and stop there. For example the regular beating of a drum or the rhythmic repetition of some sound as in a lullaby, produces a feeling

of physical ease and lulls the child to sleep. The rhythmic sound of an engine in a train or a steam-boat, the rhythmic sound of the waves breaking on the shore, nay even the the electric fan, is able to produce a soothing physical quiet. But good music does not stop there. It touches our emotions and affects them for good or for bad. Also high class technical music has in addition an intellectual appeal. In the case of one trained for the purpose, it is possible to respond to music purely on the emotional or intellectual level without much regard to the physical response. But true music really goes far deeper than those and touches our very soul and leaves its imprint upon us. Once we have had such an experience, we can never forget it. It may not be possible to explain and describe this reaction in ordinary language. It can only be felt. This is one of those mystic experiences which baffle analytical expression.

Of course, for music to be good, the producing voice should be musical. By 'musical' I do not mean merely sweet. I mean that it should be capable of those modulations which, piercing the physical, emotional and mental veils of the human nature, will be able to produce a tangible effect on the innermost soul. We know by experience that there are several singers who have very pleasing voice, but whose music touches only the outer-most fringes of our nature. Most of the theatrical singers come under this category. Personally, I have not much patience with that music. It is pleasing to hear them and I can stand them at the most for an hour or so. After that it becomes dry, monotonous, life-less and does not evoke any response. On the contrary, there are other musicians whose voices may not be quite so "pleasing," but who are able to command the attention of a discerning audience for hours and hours. I do not hold a brief for bad voice. I am decidedly of opinion that a pleasing voice goes a very long way to accentuate the effect of music, but it is not by itself music. It may be within

the experience of most of us that in the case of a real musician, even in spite of the handicap of a rugged voice, we are able to enjoy and appreciate the music. We forget the mere voice after some time and open our hearts to his *music* which goes deep down into us and produces an aesthetic experience in which the mere physical aspect is almost lost sight of.

I grant that a certain amount of training may be necessary in the initial stages to be able to rise even at the outset above the mere physical aspect and respond in a purely aesthetic way to expert music. But I am decidedly of opinion that this training is within the reach of every one. I only want to sound a note of warning against the tendency on the one hand on the part of some of the lovers and promoters of the musical art to set too much value upon the purely physical pleasure-giving aspect of music, and on the other, to neglect the emotional appeal of music and make it a dry vocal gymnastic feat. One has only to listen to the music of Papanasam Sivan to be able to appreciate fully what I have said above.

The aesthetic sublimation I have referred to, in which the dualities coalesce, must be within the experience of all those who have been moved to tears by a piece of art (drama or music). We speak of tears of joy, but tear is a physical expression of grief; the joy which we experience in tear is not merely the physical or emotional joy. It is *Ananda* which is above the pair of opposites, pleasure and pain, joy and grief. There are certain delicate aspects of music which excite our emotion, often even giving rise to choking, quickening of our heart-beat and so on. But behind these outer expressions of grief, there is a mystic joy (*Ananda*) in which both joy and grief exist in an idealised synthetic form. It is at revealing this *Ananda* which can be reached both by sublimated grief and sublimated joy that every true art must aim. This is really the spiritual aspect of art, to enable us to rise above the pair of opposites

as we see them down here and sense the oneness behind, in which these dualities and multiplicities coalesce. It is on account of the recognition of this function of music (and in fact of all fine arts) that in India Religion and Art have always gone hand in hand; temples have been seats of exquisite productions of art and have patronised various artists. And the artist of yore realised this spiritual mission and dedicated himself to the service of temples, that is to the service of God. As long as we remain true to this ideal and let no spurious or false ideal to insidiously work for the degeneration of this art of arts, our efforts to promote the cause of, and work for the advancement of, the musical art, will be crowned with success.