

1. Music : A Science or an Art ?

Is music a science or an art ? The answer to this question naturally depends on the meanings we give to the words Music, Science and Art. Music is said to be highest of the fine arts and that is true. This implies that music is Art *par excellence*. Does this mean that it is not a Science?

Now, let us consider what we mean by science and by art. In the East the connotations of these words are more comprehensive and overlapping than in the West. The Sanskrit words that correspond to the words science and art are *Shashtra* or *Vidya* and *Kala*. According to Hindu conceptions, there are 14 *Vidyas* and 64 *Kalas*. I do not wish to go into details in this matter. Suffice it to say, that, generally speaking, *Vidya* is primarily the knowledge of God and by implication it also means branches of knowledge leading to this goal. On the other hand, *Kala* covers almost all other branches of knowledge such as chemistry, biology, archery and the fine arts. It is worth noting that music is included both under *Vidyas* and *Kalas*, as *Gandharva Vidya* and *Sangeet Kala*. It may therefore be safely inferred that the Eastern conception of music was that it had two aspects, one spiritual and the other aesthetic. But in the history of the development of music, the latter aspect has been in a way subsidiary to the former. The ultimate function of music was to help the votary towards self-realisation or God-realisation.

A little thought will show that from the Hindu standpoint the demarcation between *Vidya* and *Kala* is somewhat arbitrary, inasmuch as all knowledge must in the ultimate lead to the realisation of the great mystery of God, Man and the Universe. They speak of *Para Vidya* and *Apara Vidya*, but both are *Vidyas* all the same. In almost all

branches of knowledge, we have this duality; the direct and the indirect, the inductive and the deductive, the rational and the intuitional, and so on. Ultimate realisation cannot be only along one path. Science and art in their ultimate phases achieve the same or similar objects but their methods are quite different one from the other, in some respects almost antithetic.

ART IS EMOTIONAL

Science and Art, as understood in the modern days have distinctive connotations which can be compared and contrasted. Science being essentially related to intellect and mind and Art to emotion and intuition, it would look as if they can have nothing in common. In fact, Edward Carpenter goes so far as to say, "As far as a Drama, a Picture or a Poem merely convey intelligence of new thoughts or ideas, they are not Art. To be artistic they must excite emotion. People sometimes ask, what is the meaning of such and such a work? Meaning be hanged!" Science is based on intellectual analysis, while Art is essentially related to emotion and is synthetic in its outlook. Science lays emphasis on definition, but artistic experience escapes definition; in fact it belongs to an aspect of human nature which evades such definition. The field of science is generally objective, but it is subjective experience that is the prime factor in art. Science is impersonal while art is essentially personal with ample scope for improvisation and originality. In the case of science, there may be a purely theoretic side having no bearing on actual phenomena (as for example, the various geometries which are really only logical systems), but in art a theory which has no bearing on practice has no place.

THE SAME GOAL

In spite of these differences they lead to the same Goal. From various observations, the scientist reaches some generalisations and deduces fundamental laws, the artist

leads us from the known to the unknown, the seeming to the being and helps us to get a glimpse of the Great Thought behind the phenomena which are material expressions of that Thought. Great portrait painters paint not only the individual but the type to which he belongs, the type to which several others similar to him belong. Great dramatists generalise the experiences of particular characters and place before us typical experiences. Great poets in a similar way generalise human emotions. Thus the artists enable us to have vicariously as it were, a variety of experiences and benefit by them. This generalising element, this going from the concrete to the abstract, from the objective to the subjective, from the apparent to the real, from variety to unity, is common to both science and art. To put it in other words, both help us to glimpse the mind of God behind the phenomenal world, one through intellect and the other through intuition.

But all the same, science is science and art is art; their methods are different, though one can help the other by giving a balanced background. Music is essentially and undoubtedly an *Art* though it may utilise the methods of science for purposes of codification for the benefit of the rank and file. This is something like the grammar aspect of a language. Grammar can never produce good literature; rather, it may hamper it. Language is more fundamental, it is a living aspect of human intercourse; grammar is only a code, a record of certain standard forms adopted by great literary geniuses. A poet does not care a straw for our grammar, grammar may stifle a poet, and he rebels and breaks through the prisonhouse of grammar into spacious realms of poetic fantasies, untrammelled by any conventional fetters.

THE PLACE OF SCIENCE IN MUSIC

It is the same with music. What is called the science of music is only its grammar, even in a more limited sense.

When Bharata named his great treatise on Dance and Music as *Natyasastra*, the science of *Natya*, he must have had only some such idea. No number of books, however eminent their authors may be, can give pleasure to your ear or move your heart as a sweet song. A treatise on cookery will not satisfy your tongue or fill your stomach: Art is fundamentally practical; it is the practice of art that gives the aesthetic reaction we associate with art. A treatise, a lecture or an article on Art may satisfy our mind but can never produce emotional reaction, nor lead to aesthetic experience. In dealing with music, we have to keep this constantly in mind.

RULES SHOULD NOT CRIB ART

In the development of musical art it is the *lakshya* that is the soul of the art, and *lakshana* comes in only for purposes of codification. As an art develops, there comes a time when the *lakshana* assumes too much importance and domineers over *lakshya*; that is the period of greatest danger to Art, when form dominates and stifles the life side of art. Art then becomes a formal affair without any inspiration or creative urge. While rules based on the experience of great inspired persons are useful for those who are not so gifted, they should never be allowed to usurp the place of creative work. Rules have a place in art as long as they help the preservation of the basic elements of the art; the moment they become aggressive and interfere with the creative urge of the artist, they must be curbed and relegated to their proper place.

The main difficulty with us in India is that we are a bit too intellectual and allow our rational faculty to intrude where it has no place. Music being essentially an art related primarily to human emotions and intuition, an art in which inner feeling and creative urge are of paramount

importance, to make it a field for intellectual analysis and mental delectation is to misunderstand its true function.

LAYA IS SECONDARY

In the case of Karnatic Music, I have noticed of late certain tendencies which indicate the intellectual usurpation of the function of art. The South Indian's make-up especially, is such that he is not satisfied with art discharging its legitimate functions only and giving him pure aesthetic enjoyment and emotional sublimation; he wants also to get some intellectual satisfaction. This is specially noticeable in the great interest evinced by the average South Indian concert-goer in the *tala* instruments and their manipulations. *Laya* is certainly an important factor in our music; it is said that *shruti* is the mother and *laya* the father of music. This is true; the mother nourishes the child and helps its growth; the father guides the child under loving discipline. The simile is remarkably appropriate. But when *laya* degenerates into arithmetical manipulation without any reference to aesthetic reaction it ceases to be art or even an appendage to art. In special displays on *mridangam*, *kanjira*, *ghatam* and other *tala* instruments, complicated arithmetical manipulations (sometimes even challenging the metronome !) accompanied by tympanum-breaking medley of loud sound draw applause from the audience. The inference is obvious !

CORRECT TREATMENT OF SWARAS AND RAGAS

Another noticeable tendency is the undue importance given to *swara* singing. Next to *neraval*, *swaras* have an aesthetic function to perform. In any item of singing, the *bhava* is the most important thing. It often happens that *kalpana swara* groupings become a mechanical jumble of *swara* without appropriate *bhava*; the form dominates the life. I have often seen young, immature singers who can-

not sing even well-known major ragas like Todi, Kamboji in proper style, indulging in swara-spouting!

So also, in *Ragalapana*, singers elaborate ragas in a mechanical way without any regard to correct *bhava*. Some ragas lend themselves to elaborate *alapana*, while others do not so lend themselves. Even some *melaragas* are only nominal ragas; they have little distinctive individuality or *bhava*; for example, *melaragas* like Tanarupi, Rupavati, Varunapriya, Yagapriya Salagam, Gavambhodi, Viswambari are only names; even melas like Suryakantam, Bhavapriya, Sulini, in which there are current pieces, cannot be elaborated like, say, *Mohana*, *Kamboji*, *Sahana*, which are *janyaragas*. Every item in a music concert has to be chosen only for its aesthetic merit and not for a display of mathematical permutations and combinations. There is a tendency towards degeneracy in this direction.

The advent of the mike has brought in its train untold possibilities of deterioration in our music. The essential and distinctive features of our music, the delicacy, subtlety, the fine waves and trills which make our music, all these have begun to decay; mere loudness and throaty pyrotechnics are at a premium. Quality is yielding place to quantity, subtle graces are being replaced by loud and broad effects. In short, many of the features which make for the greatness of the art are neglected. I feel that mechanisation, while useful in some spheres of human activity, ought not to be allowed into the realm of art. If this state of affairs continues, the creative artist who really makes and keeps alive true art will go into oblivion. God save us from such a catastrophe!

VENKATAMAKHI'S RAGA SCHEME

One word here about the 72-melakarta scheme of Venkatamakhi will not be out of place. The world of music owes a deep debt of gratitude to him. His intention was

to regularise correct *lakshya* and present a general framework which will be, in one sense, all-inclusive. He never himself believed that all the theoretical ragas possible from that scheme had artistic significance. While he mentioned 72 as a theoretic possibility, he handled only about 20 *mela-ragas*. The book *Ragalakshana* which gives the names and characteristics of these 72 *melas* and which is attributed to him, could not have been written by him at all; evidently it was written by someone later on and added to *Chaturdandiprakashika*. What has actually happened is that later musicians tried to make an Art out of a theoretical scheme or frame work and treat about *ragas* which, though they may be the abstract parents of some *ranjaka janyas*, cannot lay any claim to be artistic entities. Some of these *ragas* may have some theoretic interest, but it is an open question whether they have any artistic claims. I do not for a moment mean that we should confine ourselves only to the 19 and odd *melas* of old; far from it! I want growth and increasing content in an art output. But the best should always be on the basis of Art and not on mere theoretical considerations. The coat should fit the child, the latter should not be made to conform to a standardised coat. Similarly, when Venkatamakhi spoke of the 12 *swarasthanas* based on 22 shrutis in an octave, he never visualised *swaras* as fixed points. No evaluation of the actual ratios of the vibrations of the various *swaras* and shrutis was attempted, for the simple reason that the artistic value of a *swara* in a raga did not depend so much on its vibrational value as on how it was handled and what stresses and variations it was subjected to. It is only rarely that a note is used in its pure invariable form. This is responsible for the difficulty one experiences in setting our music to notation in *exact* terms.

To sum up, music is essentially an Art; but it uses the methods of science for its own purposes, never allowing

it to intrude into forbidden regions. Indian music satisfies the heart as well as the mind and goes deeper down into realms where emotion and intellect coalesce into Intuition. Its appeal is primarily to the emotion; but it sublimates these emotions into impersonal experiences where the dualities merge into a great synthesis, where joy and sorrow merge into ineffable bliss.