

4. Discipline and Freedom in Music

Some of the deepest truths of life are best expressed only in paradoxes, in apparently contradictory terms. The Ultimate is described as bigger than the biggest and at the same time as smaller than the smallest; some of the attributes given by Science to aether are contradictory.

When we talk of Freedom and Discipline in the same breath it may sound strange. But a little thought will indicate that not only these two are not inconsistent but are complementary to each other. Absolute freedom is an impossibility in the manifested universe. If every one claimed absolute freedom the result will be chaos. Our freedom in the world is conditioned by the freedom of others. Disci-

plined freedom alone will lead to stability and progress. In fact any cultural achievement is the result self-imposed discipline. The more we advance the more these self-imposed disciplines. There lies the essential difference between man and beast. The animal instinctively follows the two great natural urges, self-preservation and race preservation. As life evolves the individual takes himself in hand and minimises the time and attention he was giving to mere physical urges in his savage condition and releases more and more time and energy for higher pursuits. His lower nature is subdued and made subservient to his higher nature. The material side is well disciplined so that his spiritual nature may be more and more revealed. The more the lower nature is disciplined the more the spirit is set free to reveal itself. We may restate it thus: Life expresses itself through form, the more the form subserves the purpose of the Life the greater the freedom of the Life.

This comes out clearly in Music. It is often said about our Karnataka Music that the art suffers from too much of codified rules. This is due to misunderstanding. Of course there are rules and also there is tradition, and these two work in harmony to enable the art to achieve the highest. The most remarkable feature of our Music is that there is almost no limit to improvisation and still the rules would be followed. Let me quote Leopold Stakowski. He says,

"One of the great characteristics of the Music of India to my mind is its flexibility and freedom. While giving due consideration to traditions 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 reproduction of what is written or played, as sometimes happens with the Music of Western countries."

Nature is full of charm and beauty, but in what may be called random distribution. It is the privilege of the artist to select from the abundance of nature's gift in beauty of sound, colour, form, and so on and give a new shape which will enhance that beauty a thousand-fold. The artist makes a beautiful park out of the plants and flowers which grow in nature in forests luxuriously without a plan and design. It is the creation of this beauty from raw material supplied by nature that is the true function of the artist. And here comes the value of discipline, orderliness, plan and forethought. Nature is full of pleasing sounds, but the musician selects such of them as can be built into a beautiful garland of sounds. That is Music.

The synthesis of freedom and discipline is best illustrated in Ragalapana. The essential characteristics of the raga are given by tradition in the form of rules, and these bring out its individuality in unmistakable clarity. But it is up to the artist to clothe it in his own way, to decorate it in a gorgeous jewellery or in simple costume, without however mutilating the essential individuality. Let us take a child. It has its individuality. In whatever manner you dress it or bedeck it the child is the same. There is no limit to the variety of ways in which you can ornament it; the exact manner of such an ornamentation is left to the imagination of the designer. Something like this is what happens when artists elaborate ragas in their own way. The more fertile the artist's imagination the more the variety of clothing and decoration in which the raga is trapped. Here is an example of how perfect freedom and discipline can exist side by side and make for richer and grander art. True Freedom is Cultural Freedom which is Disciplined Freedom.

It has been said that, for Indian Music, *Shruti* (correct note-intervals) is the mother and *Laya* (Rhythm) father. There is great truth behind this statement. The mother is

the nourisher of the child, she lavishes all her love on it and perhaps sometimes over-does it with the result that it becomes a spoilt child. The father sees to it that the progress of the child is not marred by the indulgence shown by the mother, he lays down the lines along which healthy progress of the child will be assured. Taking the simile of the park, mother gathers the plants and flowers, the father lays the garden according to plan. These two aspects correspond to the freedom and discipline sides of the art.

Unfortunately at times the value of both these functioning at the same time is lost sight of, over-emphasis is laid on the form side to the detriment of the soul of music, or it may be the other way. But in any case the value of discipline lies in its helping the growth of art. If at any time this discipline misses its true mission and begins to encroach on the realm of the soul of Music, we have to stop it and confine discipline to its proper role. Such critical situations come now and then, and there is some sort of struggle for supremacy between the soul and form of Musical expression. Generally the soul wins and then follows a period of steady progress till again perhaps another such situation comes up. Thus it goes on, and the art progresses, though not always in a straight gradient, but in an undulating series of crests and falls each crest being slightly higher than the preceding crest. Such a progress is made possible only through disciplined freedom. It is this freedom which is so essential for true Culture.