

13. Music and Education

One of the most prominent features of modern educational reconstruction is the idea that is gaining ground that a child is a national asset, that the education which we now give to our children makes the nation of to-morrow and that a child is not merely a clean slate on which the teacher can write whatever he likes, nor an empty vessel into which the teacher can pour willy nilly any stuff what-

soever, but that he is a human entity, born with certain tendencies and capacities, some potential and some actual and that the object of education is to draw out these faculties, to nourish and cultivate the good tendencies and thereby cause the atrophying of the bad ones. Each human being brings to this world some special gift to give to it; at the same time he also comes to learn some lessons which can be learnt only here. Rarely two children are exactly alike in physical features, emotional tendencies and mental equipment. While environment has much to do with the development of a child's nature, we cannot ignore the fact that there are some definite faculties which the child brings with him, some tendencies that require careful nurture, some other qualities which lie hidden in his very nature but will come out if properly unfolded and nourished. Time was when the children were intended for the School and not the School for the children, when to cram up certain fashionable shibboleths and get a certain percentage of marks in an examination was considered success in education, when to grind a child through the dull machinery of a rigid and unevolving curriculum was taken as equivalent to making him or her a good citizen. But those ideas are fast going away. Attempts after attempts are being made by enthusiasts to study the child from a new standpoint and organise its education accordingly. The child is recognised as an essential unit in the national complex, and it has to be so handled as to enable it to find its place in the larger life of the nation and give unto it what it has brought with it, so that the nation may be all the better for one child properly trained and educated.

We know that there are three, or for the matter of that, four aspects of human nature which we have to consider in dealing with the education of a child, viz., the physical, the emotional and the intellectual. Beyond this, some hold, there is the spiritual nature in an individual in

which we find the synthesis of the other three aspects and which, as it were, forms the background to which these aspects are related. A system of education which neglects any of these aspects must be in the nature of things imperfect. I am afraid that the only aspect which mostly claims the attention of the educational authorities is the intellectual and that too not in the right way. Physical culture, though some extension is paid here and there to it, is not well organised. As for the education of the emotional nature, which is a very important part of our nature, very little attention is being paid to it. And it is in this connection that I should like to make a plea for the introduction of music as an integral part of our educational system.

Art in general and music in particular exerts a potent influence on our lives; it is one of the most natural and, at the same time, effective modes of self-expression. All evolution is only a process of self-expression, whether in the case of a nation or that of an individual. Art is as necessary to life as philosophy or science, religion or ethics. All art, as all true science, takes us to the Reality behind phenomena. Nature, mysterious as she is, unveils her mysteries even more to the artist than to the philosopher or the scientist. All philosophies try to find a synthesis for all life's processes, to glimpse the ideas behind the outer phenomena which are only various expressions of those ideas. The philosopher reaches them through his philosophy, the scientist through his experiments, the devotee through his love of God and the philanthropist through the service of humanity. But the artist senses the Reality behind through the beauty and harmony of God as manifested in Nature.

And of all arts music is considered to be the highest. All other arts—painting, sculpture, drama, architecture, poetry—in some way tend to reach the condition of music. We generally express our ideas regarding other arts in terms of musical thought. The following words of Walter Pater

bring out very clearly this aspect of music: "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. It is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of form and matter. In its ideal consummate moments the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; and to it, therefore, to the condition of its moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire. Music then...is the true type or measure of consummate art".

Why is that so? Because music has that mystical property of elevating our emotions to a very high plane of being, purifying them and thereby recreating our whole nature. "The Last Chord" puts this idea beautifully.

I know not what I was playing,
Or what I was dreaming then,
But I struck one chord of music
Like the sound of a great Amen.
It quieted pain and sorrow,
Like love overcoming strife :
It seemed the harmonious echo
From our discordant life,
It linked all perplexed meanings
Into one perfect peace,
And trembled away into silence.
As if it were loath to cease.

That is the power of music. In some mysterious way it takes us to sublime regions where struggle and strife cease, where all "perplexed meanings" fuse into one perfect Peace, where we know not aught but harmony and repose. And the musician, if he be a true artist, senses this through his music. It is his special privilege to rise above

the world's turmoil and sing for us harmony and peace, translate for us Divine mysteries in terms of our emotions. Profoundly true are the words of Browning :

Sorrow is hard to bear and doubt
is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme
of weal and woe :
But God has a few of us, whom
He whispers in the ear
The rest may reason, and welcome,
'tis we musicians know.

Music, as I mentioned at the outset, is one mode of self-expression. A human being must be essentially musical though he may not be a good singer. Musical instinct is as innate in human nature as any other instinct, and a system of education which neglects this important aspect of child-training is no education in the real sense of the word. If education is to draw out our faculties and help us in expressing our inner nature in all its possible modes, it cannot afford to neglect this wonderfully synthesising quality in our nature. We are all, to a greater or smaller extent, artistic, and our education must help us in developing that art and contributing our own share to the advancement of National Art.

The value of musical instruction in schools can never be overestimated. Music is a great purifier, it cleanses the school as it does our homes of all that is ugly to our senses. It gives a real tone to all that forms part of the school life. In ways which may be at times imperceptible, it works out an emotional alchemy, expunges the dross from human nature and makes it pure, harmonious and balanced. In an institution where good music is taught by really good musicians many of the problems of discipline will be automati-

cally solved. The child's nature becomes refined, delicate and responsive to higher impulses and ideas.

Madame Montessori, prominent among the ranks of modern educational reformers, says: "I have tried to have the directress of the 'Children's House' in Milan, who is a gifted musician, make a number of trials and experiments, with a view to finding more about the musical capacity of children. She was greatly surprised to discover the educational disciplinary effect of such music. She now noticed that as she multiplied and repeated the rhythm exercises the children little by little left off their ugly jumping, until finally it was a thing of the past. The directress one day asked for an explanation of this change of conduct. The older children gave various replies, whose meaning was the same :

'It isn't nice to jump'.

'Jumping is ugly.'

'It is rude to jump.'

This was certainly a beautiful triumph for our method".

What we may fail to achieve through a number of sermons or moral lessons may be easily, and at the same time pleasantly, accomplished through music.

The psychology of music is a very interesting study. In some mysterious way music (as also all other arts to some extent) goes to affect the child's character for the better. The harmony of the vibrations set up by music produces a wonderful soothing influence on the nervous system; in very many cases tends to curb the otherwise rebellious tendencies of many a youth. Even snakes are charmed by music, the deer and the cows are moved by harmony of sounds. Is it then a wonder that a human being is moved by music? The wonder is that we are not more musical than we are. An unmusical nature is an abnormality, a freak of nature.

And so the healthy development of our children's character is to a very large extent accelerated and helped by instruction in music. The ancient Greeks realised this so well that they planned their whole politics in such a way that music and art played a very important part in every kind of national activity. The moral effects attributed to music and dancing were "regarded as of such importance as to influence profoundly the whole constitution of the State". That is the power of music; one can in a musical atmosphere play upon the emotions of our school children as a musician plays on the string of a Veena or a Sitar. We can make apparently dull and irresponsive pupils wonderfully alert and responsive provided we create the necessary musical atmosphere. It is no exaggeration to say that there is no saying to what extent we can mould and develop the character of school children if only we give a very prominent place to music in our educational institutions.

We are now teaching ever so many things to our pupils in the schools, some of course useful, but some of doubtful utility. We must see that music is given the place it deserves in our institutions. I would even go to the extent of saying that, if it comes to that, we could omit some of the subjects we are teaching at present and put in music in their place. Our pupils will be all the better for it.

There are a number of ways in which we can introduce music in our schools and utilise its influence to bring about an improved state of things. The school work may begin and end with music. Instruction begun in the harmonious atmosphere produced by music is bound to be more impressive than otherwise. As many opportunities as possible may be found to introduce music and singing in class work. And above all, music may be taught, I may say must be taught, to the pupils as one of the subjects of instruction. At the hands of the educationalists and the authorities con-

cerned, the art of music must find a much better reception and more sympathetic treatment than now.

The greatness or littleness of the nation in the future is, to a very large extent, dependent on how the youth of today are trained. In the first place, they have to become cultured citizens, they must help our Nation to express the best in her along her own lines and consistently with her special genius. The typical man or woman of culture has always "a certain amount of intuition playing about him or her." He is not merely a scholar, but he is—at any rate ought to be—one who would grasp the essence of things, understand the fitness or otherwise of certain modes of thought and activity and will have an instinctive sense of proportion in things connected with our lives. He will intuitively feel whether a thing is in or out of place in a given scheme. If we analyse all the aspects of what we call culture we shall find that all of them lead up to this one distinguishing feature. And music enables one to do that, though the *modus operandi* of the subjective process resulting in that swift intuition is not so very obvious. An artist, a musician, will be distinguished by the possession of this superrational faculty of intuition which will, in some mysterious way, enable him to grasp the essence of things, to sense and assimilate harmony and shake off inharmonious things. All this he will be able to do not so much by cold logic or processes of sequential reasoning, as by a swift perception which like a lightning flash illumines his vision and makes him know things as they are and not as they seem to be or as they are by reason argued to be. This is the peculiar gift of the artist, and so, music goes a very long way towards making an all-round man or woman of culture.

The second idea at the back of an educational system properly organised must be, as I said just now, to help the citizen to express himself as a unit of the Nation to which

he belongs. Each nation has a soul of its own which tries to express itself in several modes of thought and activity, and we are all, in one sense, only cells in that bigger organism. The standard culture of an Eastern nation differs, in several essential points, from that of a Western nation. The very outlook on life varies with different human races and that colours the different aspects of a nation's life. And so in Art there is a great national Art peculiar to India. India's soul has always expressed itself in certain definite modes of musical thought. There are some special features about Indian music which distinguish it from other musical systems of the world. And if our youths are to be trained to be channels for the expression of our national consciousness the music we impart to them must be truly national, truly Indian in spirit. There is nothing to prevent an Indian from admiring or learning foreign music, but then he must already have learnt Indian music. An Indian who does not care for the music of his country cannot really understand any foreign music, though he might be able to indulge in spurious imitation. Plato said that "the introduction of a new kind of music must be shunned as imperilling the whole State, since styles of music are never disturbed without affecting the most important political institutions". While we should allow our musical system to evolve and assimilate external ingredients to its advantage, we should also see that it retains its distinctive feature and that, if any change is made at all, "such change must be organic, not sudden. and it must be an evolution in accordance with the heart of the national genius". And so I plead that while music should form part of our school curriculum it should be essentially Indian for Indian Students.