

18. Impersonal Art-form of Dikshitar's Music

It may look at the outset that there is some kind of contradiction in the wording of the title of this talk. Art is considered to be essentially a matter of personality; the artist cannot be divorced from his work, from his own art creation; the personality of the artist is stamped on and is revealed in every work of art that he creates. This is generally true; it is a matter of common experience that an art-connoisseur is able to fix the author of a piece of art work merely by looking at or hearing it. This can be easily explained. A work of real art is only the artist's mode of expression of his reaction to the phenomena which have impact on him from outside. An object, a person, an event or a scenery has to the artist a meaning more comprehensive, more significant and more permanent than to others. They are all only expressions,—however imperfect, faint or distorted of some great concepts in the cosmic mind; and the artist

attempts to sense those great concepts through their outer expressions down here. These are only gateways opening to a vision of the Reality behind; the artist senses this Reality in some mysterious, apparently vague, undefinable way. His imagination comes into play to a large extent. In this subjective laboratory of his imagination those outer expressions are put into the melting pot of intuition and he feels an urge to give out through his art the result of this process; he may not realise all this in his rational nature, because real art belongs to a region beyond the rationalising faculty, it belongs to a super-mental realm of existence. But the inner urge in the artist is what makes a real work of art. In this connection I am reminded of what a great art critic once said. When the critic was in Japan he happened to meet a great Japanese artist and asked him, partly in joke and partly in all seriousness, what it was that made him "waste" some good paper and pigments and produce what is called a "picture". The artist understood the question and, with a smile, answered the critic thus, "You see, I cannot tell you why I do it or how I do it. On a fine morning, when the sun is just rising, when I stand in a garden and see his golden rays filtering through the green foliage, when I see a young bird on a branch singing and dancing in utter self-forgetful joy, something happens within me, I seem to get into touch with something Infinite, something vast and boundless, and a pang swells up within me and I feel an urge to create something expressive of this inner experience, with the result that, as you say, I waste some paper and pigments and produce a picture, and I feel it is my, my own child, my special creation, my offering to the Infinite in which we live and move and have our being." These are significant words and reveal a great truth about art and artists. Art productions generally have on them the stamp of the artists who gave birth to them.

This is seen in every branch of art and particularly in music. Except in the cases where music is made to order, so to say, (as in the case of cinema songs, manufactured in dozens, in a machine-like manner, to suit the artists' limitations and the whims of the directors), music compositions of great artists have the stamp of the composers' personality on them to an unmistakable degree. The artists' inner reactions to outer stimuli, his temperamental peculiarities, his weaknesses and strong points can be seen to some extent in his art creations. It is often possible from a study of an artists' work to understand him and his general mental and emotional make-up, to size him up so to say. The human element, the personality of the artist colour and irradiate his work. Thyagarajawswami's compositions reveal, as in a mirror, his entire personality; his varying moods, his intimate mystic experiences are well revealed in his work; it seems possible to construct his entire personality by means of his compositions. The same is true, in varying degrees, of many other musicians, Syama Sastri, Jayadeva, Purandaradas and others. But in the case of Dikshitar's compositions there is a remarkable absence of this personal element. We may notice his scholarship, his mastery, his dexterity, his greatness in general. But all this is only in the surface; they do not reveal the soul, they do not tell us about his personal reactions, the inner workings of his mind and feeling. (By the way it may be remarked that in the case of Swati Tirunal also, there is this absence of personal element in his compositions.) We do not find among Dikshitar's krithis any pieces which correspond to *Palukuganta* or *Entugokalinura* or *Entudakinado* or *Choralademira* nor do we any pieces dealing with mystic experiences like *Alakalalla* or *Koluvamarakada* or *Natimata* or *Entabhagyama*. This absence of the personal element is revealed not only in the ideas

of the sahityams but in the musical form or mould of his kritis also. One striking characteristic of the personal element is that it colours, limits, at times even distorts the form of expression employed by the person. The moods of the personality influence the art expression. The same raga handled in different moods expresses itself in any one mood only partially, the extent of this incompleteness, this limitation depending on the person's reactions to these varying moods. I do not propose to go into details; a study of Thyagaraja's kritis will bear out this point. In the case of Dikshitar there is no trace of this incompleteness or deficiency or limitation or partial manifestation; the musical mould he adopts is complete, is all inclusive, is almost transcendental. This can be seen in every one of his pieces. The beginning phrases of the kritis are enough to reveal the raga in its entirety, its fulness; its essence, its uniqueness, its ramifications and its possibilities are all there. This faultless completeness is seen in the structure of the sahityam also and in the general framework which takes in the raga, sahitya and tala and makes a complete, virile, vibrant musical edifice. "Balagopala" in *Bhairavi*, "Sri Subrahmanya Namaste" in *Kambhoji*, "Akshayalinga vibho" in *Sankarabharanam*, "Sri Rajagopala" in *Saveri* are eternal monuments which will last through manvantaras and kalpas, because they are like great Archetypes in the Cosmic mind. If I were a fanatic, I should say that any phrase which is not used somewhere in "Sri Subrahmanyaya" cannot properly bring out the bhava of Kambhoji. So also in regard to the other kritis referred to.

One might ask, "How is it that the personality is so suppressed, had Dikshitar no human feelings, had he no psychic experiences, no emotional ecstasies and depressions?" Dikshitar was certainly human, intensely human. Did he not make effort to bring joy to his wife who was crazy about ornaments? Did he not feel grief when he heard of his

brother's death? He was human; but he sublimated his human personality, raised it to the level of the Impersonal and normally lived on this level. It was not that he ceased to be human, ceased to be personal, but he lived on a higher level of consciousness—which included and sublimated the personal and where the limitations and deficiencies of the human personality were transmuted into something all inclusive, into a great synthesis. This is the psychological explanation for the magnificent richness, all-embracing completeness and vibrant perfection of his musical compositions.

We often hear people speak of the low tempo, slow (almost languid) movement of his kritis and refer to this as a defect. In the first place, I should like to mention that there is no absolute standard for tempo or movement; it is obviously relative. We hear the same piece sung in different tempos by different people; on the veena the tempo is and ought to be relatively low, on the flute the tempo is higher, consciously or unconsciously. All this apart, what about the kritis like *Chintayamakandamoola* or *Brudan-nayaki* or *Ramachandram bhavayami* and above all *Vatapi Ganapatim* whose tempo can be as high as one might wish? Even in these pieces with comparatively quicker movement, we notice the characteristic completeness and perfection. This sublimation of the personal to the level of the impersonal in the realm of creative music is a rare achievement and perhaps Dikshitar is the one artist who did it so successfully. The true mark of this sublimation is the universality and synthesis so characteristic of Dikshitar's work. As Dr. R. Vaidyanatha Swami once remarked, "Dikshitar's music furnishes the fullest and the most integral manifestation of the values specific to Carnatic music.....Dikshitar's kritis are a condensed epitome of the spiritual record of India".

Another aspect of this impersonality may also be referred to here. The conception of Dikshitar's compositions

are not the result of ordinary mental processes, of thinking and building part by part in succession and then assembling the parts together to build the whole. He conceives the whole as one indivisible unit and gives entire form to it at one stroke as it were. It is this supramental faculty of intuition that is the dominant factor in his art creation. How tragic it is to see the depth to which some have now fallen from this height! We find now some one person writing the sahityam, another person setting it to some raga and perhaps another fixing the tala for it. Such stuff is spurious and a person with any degree of musical sensibility can easily recognise the spuriousness by the jar it produces on his aesthetic nature.

I do not want to refer now to the many-sided merits of Dikshitar's kritis, the excellence of the sahityam, the strict adherence to the rules of musical prosody, the appropriateness of the raga, tala and tempo used to express an idea and so on. These have been often explained in detail by competent savants. I would, however, refer to one unfortunate idea which was current sometime ago and which, I am glad, did not command much support. Some persons cannot feel happy unless they indulge in making comparisons between great men; leaving aside the question whether those critics are competent to make such comparisons, one cannot forget that such comparisons lead us nowhere. It used to be said that while the kritis of some great composers contain ideas and illustrations and didactic stories, Dikshitar's compositions are of the "Mam pahe" type, containing mostly invocations to various deities. This is true and it is on that account that they belong to a different plane altogether. A kriti is not necessarily the appropriate medium for giving moral or intellectual instruction, or for dilating upon abstruse philosophical topics or for narrating stories. If any one wants to do this, he may write a prose book or write verses, ahavals and kummis and please him-

self. As Christian Darnton has pointedly mentioned in his book "*You and music*", he may write a book but *not music*. In Dikshitar's compositions such invocations have a deeper significance to students of mantra sastra, tantra sastra and yoga sastra, about which this is not the place to speak. They are simply the ways along which the inspired soul seeks and makes contact with the Oversoul in its multifarious manifestations.

I shall now close with a reference to another phase of this, what I may call, super-personal attitude. Individual prejudices and predilections have no place there. Whatever is good is absorbed and assimilated and built into the synthesis. In the wide impersonal world of Dikshitar's musical ideas there was room enough for English tunes and Hindustani rendering too. We often hear people disparage some artists by saying that they use too many Hindustani touches. I am one who is anxious that the purity of our Carnatic music should be preserved at all costs. I am anxious to guard it against the inroads that are insidiously being made into it by spurious art savants. I want the essential and unique features of our musical system to be kept intact. But our minds and hearts should always be open to new ideas and modes which can be fitted into our musical structure without sacrificing any of the essentials. It may be that some of these new ideas go a long way to enrich and enliven the system and put in also additional vitality. One should not shut out such naturally assimilable features. Such absorptions have been made provisionally in the past as the immortal history of India will tell. Dikshitar went to Benares with Chidambaranatha yogi and heard the North India style of singing also. I am inclined to believe that before Dikshitar went north *Hindolam* was generally sung with *chatusruti dhaivatam* as in the kriti *Manasuloni*. Dikshitar heard it sung with *Suddha Dhaivatam* and felt it could be advantageously absorbed into our system on account of its charm and

appeal. And he gave us the masterpiece *Nirajakshi Kamakshi* in Hindolam with *dha* flat. This must have caught the ears of ordinary listeners and savants as well. My own belief is that Thyagaraja himself, after hearing this, made his kriti "*Samajavara*" in this new form of *Hindolam*. It is quite possible that the Hindolam of "Manasuloni" is pre-"Neerajakshi", while that of the kriti "*Samajavaragamana*" is post-"Neerajakshi". (This fact may incidentally help us in fixing the date of Sangrahachudamani of Govindacharya who gives *dha* flat for Hindolam in his work.)

Such is the greatness of Dikshitar; he lived and moved and had his being in a world far beyond this mundane world; though living down here as an individual his soul was really in communion with the Universal Soul. His musical compositions reveal this phase in abundance. They are perfect models, faultless jewels, cosmic chords revealing for ever the Eternal Harmony. They transcend our petty ideas, our limited faculties, and roam as free larks in the realm of Pure Nada. One can also sense something of that Freedom, that Peace and Calm and that Impersonal Joy with the help of his unique compositions. May we be worthy of that privilege!