

# ATTITUDES OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN INDIAN AND WESTERN MUSIC

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Music, like all cultural manifestations, is the expression and mirror image of certain attitudes of consciousness.

By cultural manifestations I mean art and science, the spoken and the written word, as well as even, for instance, fashion and cookery. All these cultural activities reflect the attitudes of human consciousness by their style, expression and theme.

Music, like all art, is a seismographical manifestation of human thinking and feeling.

Thus the Western music of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Classical and Romantic epochs, or the music of our days is the result of varied, often contrasting attitudes of consciousness.

Thus the music of different peoples corresponds to different attitudes and types of consciousness, and the music of the East is the result of one definite attitude of consciousness and the music of the West of another.

In this way, that is, as a reflection of a certain attitude of consciousness, styles arise, and styles are the sum total of these characteristics which give the work of art its identity.

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So music reflects the degree and character of the consciousness peculiar to its creator or to the cultural sphere from which it springs. It reflects the thinking and feeling of the people in the historical epoch in which it is written.

By consciousness I mean the ability to grasp the relationships that constitute us, to arrange them in a mutual relationship to one another and to us, and to recognise their "intentionality", that is to say, the connection between the being object and the experiencing ego and its function.

Consciousness does not exhaust itself in formal knowledge. It is neither identical with the thought process, nor is it limited to mere recognition.

Consciousness is a process of constant association, a creative act of integration.

The way in which we see the world depends on the type of our consciousness, which is capable of limiting this world both in extent and time.

Of the great number of known musical traditions, two great musical cultures complete in themselves, stand out. They are similar and at the same time fundamentally different from one another, and belong to fundamentally different attitudes of consciousness: Classical Indian, and Classical Western music.

By classical Western music I mean here the so-called classical-romantic tradition of Western music of the 18th and 19th centuries, in other words, the music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann or Wagner.

I should like to call the attitude of consciousness on which classical Indian music is based "intuitive-peripheral", that is to say one understanding by intuition and peripheral thinking. The attitude of consciousness on which classical Western music is based on the other hand, I should like to call "rationalistic-discursive" that is to say one understanding by rational analysis.

It is interesting to note that India has developed her whole culture out of an intuitive attitude of consciousness, whereas Europe reached the decisive climax in its culture during the rationalistic phase of its history.

Apart from the fundamentally different structure of Indian music—in which the octave can be split up into as many as 22 intervals (in

Western music the octave contains only twelve) and thus has, as it were, a micro-tonal character—it seems to me that one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of classical Indian and classical Western music is the absence in the one and the presence in the other of the so-called harmonic leading note, that is, of that musical phenomenon on which is based the principle of composition which gives classical Western music a kind of third dimension, its characteristic tonality.

Speaking about the harmonic leading note I do not refer only to the seventh step of a scale which leads to the eighth step, that is, to the octave of the keynote, as happens in Indian music too, but to any sound which, on account of its position in the musical structure and in the prevailing key, forcibly moves a semitone, upwards or downwards, creating in this way a basic and harmonic relationship—a third dimension—as I said, the so-called tonality.

By dimension I mean the manner of hearing successively, simultaneously or concentrically.

The first dimension, usually called “melody” or “melodics”, consists in the successive composition of sounds.

The second dimension, usually called “harmony”, consists in the simultaneous composition of sounds.

The third dimension consists in the concentric composition of sounds and is usually called “tonality”.

Classical Indian music is mainly based on the principle of succession and sometimes of simultaneity. Thus classical Indian music generally is mono-dimensional and also two-dimensional.

Classical Western music, however, is concentrically composed and becomes therefore three-dimensional, by the action of the harmonic leading-note.

So the absence or presence of the harmonic leading-note is one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of classical Indian and classical Western music.

The harmonic leading-note and the consequent principle of tonality is a musico-psychological phenomenon, which belongs in the sphere of musical perception or more exactly, of Gestalt perception, and which arises as a reflection of a rational consciousness of space and time, creating a kind of “spatial” sound and feigning the impression of musical perspective. At the same time it splits the melody up into temporal

sections the so-called bars or measures and produces, by a rationally established hierarchy of chords, a kind of musical logic, an inter-dependence of spatial and temporal elements, which enables the listener to sense and anticipate what is to follow, and when the phrase begins and ends.

A musical culture, whose sound structure dispenses with tonal leading note relationships, is the expression of an attitude of consciousness for which space and time are not factors rationally calculated, but emotionally and spiritually experienced phenomena. This kind of attitude of consciousness—I called it “intuitive-peripheral”—is that which pertains to Indian classical music.

The monumental Indian temple buildings with their, as it were, naturally grown forms, are evidence of the absence of a rational consciousness of space, for to the builders of these temples, space was not depth space, interior space in the Western sense, but cavernous and vaulted space, cosmic undifferentiated space, a state of being embedded in the world, and is reminiscent of the tremendous cosmological conception according to which the universe itself is nothing but a tremendous cavern.

These temples are not constructed separate from nature. It seems as if nature had given birth to space, as if inner and outer space were two complementary factors. A close relationship between outside and inside is reflected in an experienced—and I must stress the word “experienced”—in an experienced unity of soul and nature, which finds its expression also in the forms of classical Indian music.

Like these temples, Indian music is not architected in the rationalistic sense of the word, but spontaneously evolved and unfolded. Characteristic of Indian music is the fact that the form of the composition is not “composed” in the Western sense, not rationally “constructed” but intuitively “improvised”. In other words, it grows and develops naturally, so to speak, and represents an incessant creative process.

The absence of a rational consciousness of space implies the absence of a rational consciousness of time, for time and space condition each other.

Thus the temporal aspect of Indian music dispenses with rational time division and rhythmic quadrature—characteristics of Western music—and mostly avoids symmetry and symmetrical periodisation.

Time in Indian music is “experienced” time. Not rationally “measured” time. Rationally “measured” time is the time peculiar to

Western music, whose time elements—duration of a note, metrum (that is the unit used to measure time) and rhythm—are subject to rational control by the clock or the metronome, and whose sound aspect, that is what the listener perceives, is characterised by the dividing bars.

In Western music time is dividing movement, directional sequence, numerical, quantifying order.

In contrast to this, time in Indian music is lasting, non-directional movement reposing in a whole; is qualifying order.

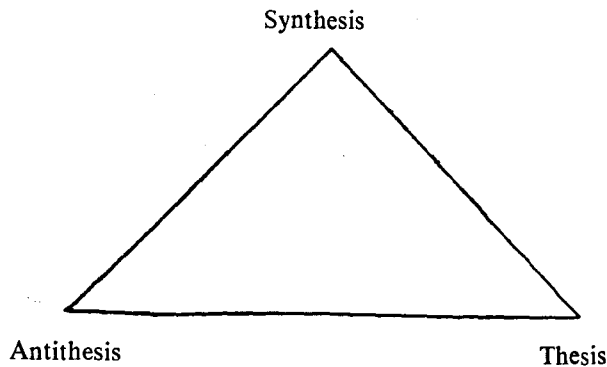
In Indian music, time is psychical, emotional time, a reflection of the human soul, natural, experienced time. Its metric unit is the natural of man. The “natural” movement of Indian music knows no phases of time like past, present and future. It only knows complementary coming and going, without beginning or end. Whereas listening to Western music requires a conscious association of past and future musical events within the piece, listening to Indian music consists in the perception of always new, often unexpected sound phenomena, which circle round a central idea, whose reality is expressed by the *raga*, and whose sphere of validity is the present.

Whereas classical Indian music is a spiritual experience, meditation, an “exercise” in the sense of the Latin term “*exercitium an integrum*”, classical Western music is representation, the representation of man, the representation of his feelings and the expression of his sentiments. For the rational consciousness of space and time implies the consciousness of man as personality, as individual, because the perception of the world and the environment as an object presupposes the perception of man as subject. For the objectivisation of space and time requires an ego which is conscious of itself, and can relate itself to space and time.

That is the reason why, whereas early Indian painting dispenses with perspective, in other words represents a non-spatial two-dimensional, plain world, in Western painting, space is made visible by means of perspective, and man himself is brought into the daylight of consciousness.

The consciousness of man and world as two non-identical, different factors results in a specific thought process, which presupposes the counterposition of two opposing terms—thesis and antithesis—from which a third, the synthesis, is derived.

This process of thinking, generally called dialectical, which has dominated Western thought since Plato and Aristotle, because of its form can conveniently be called "triangular" too.



This typically rationalistic process of thinking is also the basis of all the classical and romantic music in the Western tradition. From the counterposition of two opposing terms like consonance and dissonance, major and minor, tonic and dominant, chord and melody, tension and conflict originate. And by a conflict two contrasting musical statements—two contrasting themes—lead to a synthesis which completes the unity of the work.

In the rationalistic, dialectical method of thinking and in its correspondent music, unity is the result of a development, of a conflict between two themes, of a dramatic action, and not, as in classical Indian music, a starting-point.

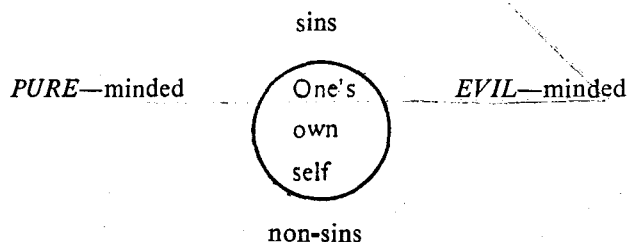
In Indian thought, unity is not synthesis, result, but as I just stressed, exordium. All the contrasting terms are, a priori, the correspondents of two poles which complement one another, forming a whole. And just as summer and winter rotate round the year, and life and death round human existence, so do all the melodic and rhythmic formulae rotate round a central idea inherent in the *raga*.

The conflict of contrasts, which leads to dramatic tension, is alien to Indian music. Its nature lies in a rotating, incessant process of change taking place round a central point—here it is interesting to note that in nearly all civilizations the circle is the symbol of the soul—an unending process of change without development, without aim.

This process of thinking, in contrast to the "triangular" one, we might call "circular".

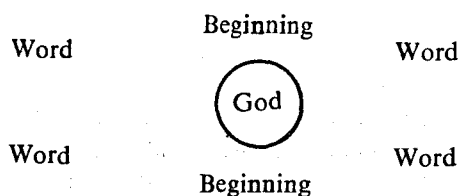
In order to demonstrate this rotating, circular process of thinking in a concentrated form, I should like to cite you a quotation of Buddha :

“One’s own self sins  
One’s own self evil-minded  
One’s own self flees from sin  
One’s own self is pure-minded.  
Oneself is evil or pure,  
No other can save one.”



In the Bible too you may find this thought process. I remind you of the beginning of the Gospel of St. John :

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.”



Also here you see a rotating, polarizing pattern of terms : the silent beginning, silence, as pole to the spoken beginning, the word, and this as pole to the speaker, to God. And from God, the centre of this idea, in the opposite sequence, the return to the silent pole, to silence.

Western rationalistic, dialectical, triangular thought is directional thought ; thought with an aim, striving towards a climax, thought which develops and “describes”.

It is therefore not mere chance that a large part of Western music is of a descriptive character. I am here referring to the idea of programme music from its beginnings in the madrigal to the symphonic poems by Liszt, Berlioz and Richard Strauss.

Indian intuitive, circular thought, on the other hand, conceives as a whole, and is something which complements itself, which does not "describe", but "circumscribes".

Two fundamentally different attitudes of consciousness created two just as different music traditions. They should not, however, be seen as opposite, but as complementary factors.

It is steadily becoming more and more obvious that we must learn to understand the world as a whole, and culture as culture of mankind.

Eastern thinking and feeling, Western culture and civilization, if looked at individually, are only part of the whole. Only if we consider the inner interdependence of the two cultures in the sense of a reciprocal correspondence, will it be possible for us to understand each individual culture, and, in addition, mankind as a whole.

I believe that we are approaching an age in which the attitude of consciousness of both the East and the West will undergo decisive changes. It seems to me that the first symptoms can already be felt in all spheres of human activity, and primarily in the work of our most advanced scientists and artists.

The influence of the East in the West and the West in the East in all spheres of human existence, point to the development of a structure of consciousness whose characteristic seems to be an integrating attitude towards all cultural, scientific, and political manifestations. The famous German physicist, Heisenberg, in his book *Physics and Philosophy* stressed, that "the great Japanese scientific contribution since the last war in the field of theoretical physics, could be taken as evidence of certain relationships between the traditional ideas of the Far East and the philosophical substance of the Quantum Theory if one has not passed through the naive materialistic system of Western thought which was still predominant in the first few decades of our century".

New and faster means of communication, closer economic ties, and an increasing consciousness of mutual dependence have brought the peoples of the world closer together. Nationalism, religious divergences,



party spirit, and sectionalism are on the decline, and even in our consciousness the world will increasingly be accepted as a whole.

The great encounter between East and West is about to become reality.

Eastern and Western thought will be corner-stones of a new integrating culture, a culture which gives promise of the unity of mankind, and of a new humanism.

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