

# CLASSICAL MUSIC AND MASS APPEAL

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We come across frequent demand, by a section of the modern listeners and conference organisers, for simplification of classical Music in the name of wider appeal and popularity. Serious allegations like intricate, devoid of melody, opposed to receptivity and sensitiveness by the listeners and, therefore, incapable of evoking response, meaningless, are levelled against the existing classical music and its exponents. We also hear about the demand for popularisation and simplification of classical music. The norms regulating critical appreciation of classical music during the last few decades appear to have been influenced by the latest trends in other spheres. The democratic process based on numerical superiority has apparently deeply impressed at least few critics, they have started pleading in favour of the same norm i.e. judging superiority by headcount, even in the realm of fine arts like classical music. Withdrawal of the centuries old royal patronage, consequent upon merger of the princely states, without adequate effective substitute, increasing dependence of the artists on limited mass media music conferences and organisers have tilted the balance in favour of numerical appreciation. Audience in these concerts is constituted by listeners drawn from various walks of social life. All of them need not necessarily be serious listeners but these listeners are the modern patrons. The artist has to cater to their taste and choice to ensure quantitative popularity and demand.

## **The short cut approach**

Apparently comfortable life with pomp and show, status symbols of their counterpart musicians or artists commanding mass and stage popularity, allures the classical music artists, to somehow woo and rope in as many listeners as possible within their fold. Fundamental nature of classical and other forms of music is different. Mass audience might provide comfortable life. Socio-economic pomp and show but not necessarily genuine response from the listeners. Desired response from the audience to classical music performance requires persistent hard and regular practice by the artists for years with patience, dedication and understanding. The short-cut

method approach for gaining popularity in various spheres, has swept away the younger, particularly the immature artists, who are anxious for overnight success and popularity. Even the artists, who have somehow got entry just into the green room, are eager to make a dash to the stage. Similar is the case with some of the listeners who want not merely to relish the intricacy and technique of classical music but also advise and guide the artists, without taking pains, deeper understanding of the art and necessary discipline. Attending classical music concerts is gradually becoming a fashion than devotion, at least by some self-styled critics. Some of the organisers are, similarly, not genuinely interested in classical music. The concerts for them are multipurpose gathering and means to other end. The demand for simplification of classical music in the name of popularity is obviously inspired by the artists and listeners both in search of short-cut approach.

### **Popularity a relative term**

The word "Popular" is confusing. It is all the more misleading, when used in the realm of art in socio-political sense. The numerical superiority indicating "majority opinion" does not necessarily reflect qualitative superiority as well. The process of election is frequently governed by several factors other than quality of the candidate and therefore misleads finally. Moreover the word "Popular" is itself relative rather than Absolute term. Numerically, Khayal is far more popular than Dhrupad, Dhamar or Tappa. Thumri is all the more popular in relation to Khayal. Other styles like 'Bhajan', 'Ghazals' etc. and the artists can legitimately claim wider appeal and popularity. The folk styles like Kajari, Chaiti, Biraha, Alha or Nautanki, Jatra or Tamasha attracting thousands, leave all other styles behind in regard to popularity and appeal. The numerical support, therefore, need not always be the final evidence of qualitative superiority as well. Moreover, we ought to distinguish between crowd and enlightened listeners. Critics and their judgement. The method of "Headcount" is not merely misleading and out of tune but also irrelevant, so far as assessment of fine arts particularly classical music is concerned.

### **Qualitative assessment**

Qualitative superiority and popularity are in a sense, two different ends like the language spoken by common man and the ornamental phrases and language used in literary work. How can we expect the street common-man to understand and appreciate the literary works by Shakespeare, Goldsmith, or Valmiki, Kalidas, Magha and others? It might also be unfair to ask the litterateur to produce works within the reach of masses, irrespective of their mental level or background. Such suggestion is also not feasible. Appreciation with proper understanding requires intimate knowledge of the language, basic concept principles of rhetoric. In case, recitation of even best pieces of poems in French, German, or Russian or any other strange

language appear mere noise, who is to be blamed, the poets or the listeners not knowing even A.B.C. of the particular language? How can, therefore, we expect popularity among the masses, including the bathroom singers or street singers, from the classical music artists? It would be not merely impracticable but also unfair and expecting too much. Qualitative assessment of any fine art or piece of literature, on the basis of headcount is, therefore, bound to lead to extreme and perverted conclusions and logical fallacy.

### **From Gross to Subtle**

Transition from gross to subtle, visible to the invisible, material to spiritual is the essential characteristic of the fine arts, particularly Music while in the realm of the fine arts like sculpture and painting material tools like chisel, hammer, canvass, painting brush are used as media for aesthetic expression. The consequent aesthetic manifestation in gross form, may be a statue or painting, evokes appreciation and response more conveniently. That is perhaps why dance performance commands wider response from the audience. The gestures, various poses and movements facilitate receptivity. Similarly, other styles like so-called Light music, Bhajan, Ghazals etc, where words have the upper hand in musical rendering, the mass appeal is all the more wider. The film music goes a step ahead. Here it is not mere dominance of words but close association of the film songs with the particular sequence or scene that evokes mass receptivity by the common man. Any one can mark clear varying degrees of receptivity among the listeners having seen the particular film and other than those who simply listen to the songs. Material associated with specific scene is at least significant factor in popularity of such music. The musical appeal is secondary in case of film music. Thus gross is the medium, easier and wider can be the receptivity and appeal. It is not to undermine the melody or appeal of gross manifestation but the relative place of words, gross element and musical forms is not to be overlooked. The artists like Ramesh Nadkarni might appear extremist for his view. Classical music and popularity are contradictory terms but it would be difficult to disagree with the suggestion that for qualitative assessment one should go beyond mere numbers.

### **The Language of Music**

The subtle expression of emotions through classical music transcends words and other gross forms. Words in classical music provide basic support for onwards transition like the Sagunopasana or place of idol worship, the concept of God in relation to the Nirguna absolute. In classical music, therefore Sahitya becomes unrecognisable when the singing as elaborate Music has its own language. The language of Music proceeds in sentences composed of musical phrases and conventional idioms. The musical rhythm followed the natural formation of the musical phrases and idioms. The

changes of intonations of the musical phrases concerning the microtonal variations create emotional effects. Different shades and colours of musical note, oscillations, varying accent provides meanings to the musical notes. Even in our day to day conversation we notice mere repetition of the same sentence with varying accent and emphasis indicate interrogation and affirmation or request, command and annoyance. The technique is known as *Kāku Bheda* in Music. Pure music transcending the words reveals specialisation in the language of Music having in it the norm of architecture in *Alankara* and *gamak*. At times artistic permutations and combination of musical notes, their subtle shades and colours constitute the language of Music, conveying the moods and sentiments of words. How can one really understand and appreciate the typical language of Music without depth understanding of its phrases, syllables, usage and the subtle aesthetic aspect? That requires adequate training, patience and discipline. There is no short cut method. Receptivity of the sensitive listener creating his own music in consonance with the music of the artist, empathy on the part of both, play vital role in the quality of music performance. In this sense, classical music, is viewed as art for the classes (the enlightened critics) than for the masses. There are other gross forms of art for them. Mahrshi Vyas was therefore, very particular in conveying that an ideal performance of traditionally trained artists should be presented only before *Vidvatsadas* consisting of genuine lovers of art and enlightened critics and not before those who were pseudo lovers and ignorant critics (*Mahabharat* 2.4.39 and 12-142-11 to 16).

### Intellect and Heart

There is no doubt, similarity between the two words "Classification" and "Classical" yet the partial similarity in spelling can be no valid ground for defining classical Music as a style full of classifications and dominated by rules, principles, as suggested by a section of critics and artists. Classical really means "Being of the First Order, associated with great exponents, correct and refined style (See *Oxford's Dictionary* page 127). Thus antiquity and excellence are two elements of classical music. It will not be logical to conclude that classical music is dominated by Intellect than heart. Every fine art or literature has certain basic principles and doctrines constituting the frame work, its own grammar. Systematic evolution of any art or language is not possible without certain principles and grammar which provides channel for systematic development. Not merely the fine arts like Music but even in other spheres including literature one can find rules of grammar and principles regulating the growth. It is the extreme emphasis on this particular aspect that creates the real difficulty reducing music to mere acrobatics devoid of emotion, melody and appeal. The jugglery of grammar and technique, tempo, the consequent thrill and other techniques making the performance beyond the understanding of the average listener were introduced by certain professional artists probably to ensure their place, position and the livelihood in the royal courts and safeguard against challenge by other

artists and critics. The real art was lost in the labyrinth of acrobatics and, therefore, lost its meaningful appreciation. All the royal patrons were not necessarily enlightened critics and well-acquainted with the art and its technique. They also had fancy for particular artists and their style, irrespective of objective assessment. The artists had to cater to the taste of their royal patrons. Individual taste and opinion than any other norm or healthy tradition was more important for the artists and their employment. The art and its styles evolved accordingly. The subjective norms and pecuniary consideration eclipsed the real aesthetic expression through musical notes, that lead to the transcendental Divine bliss. Intellect i.e. grammar and rules provide the frame-work and Heart i.e. Emotions constitute the content of art. Adequate balance between the two can make performance appealing to the willing listeners.

#### **Baseless allegation**

The present listeners and critics are far more critical and objective in assessment of performance and popularity of the artists. Family heredity need not necessarily be a decisive factor in all cases in the quality of performance and thereby attaining popularity of the renowned teacher. Sons, nephews, close family members or disciples of several outstanding artists could not make much headway. To accuse the classical music artists of having deprived Music of its melody and appeal would be as misleading as denial of the Sun during day time. The galaxy of outstanding artists like Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Ustad Ameer Khan, Faiyaz Khan, Bundu Khan, Pt. Omkarnath Thakur, D.V. Paluskar, Bhimsen Joshi, Inayat Khan, Vilayat Khan, Abdul Aziz, Pandit Jasraj and others commanding wide popularity expose hollowness of the allegations against classical Music. Moreover, even in the field of film music frequently quoted as Ideal of popularity the number of artists has been limited right from K.L. Saigal, C.H. Atma, Shamsad Begum, Mohd. Rafi, Mukesh, Mahendra Kapoor, Lata Mangeshkar, Suman Kalyanpur, Asha, Sulakshna Pandit. How can therefore one expect every one to reach the highest pedestal of classical Music? Obviously, it is not the grammar or technique but incorrect and disbalanced exploitation of technique in composition and performance that makes music unpopular. Classical music has its own rich heritage.

#### **Cultural slavery**

Ironically, the roots of cultural slavery and inferiority have gone deeper despite more than three decades since political independence. We still look at the testimonials by foreign listeners for adjudging professional skill, popularity of the artists and even for determining their fee revision. The cases of overnight hike in remuneration, performance fee, immediately on return from foreign tour are frequent. Some artists too, on return from abroad develop a musical swagger and preen themselves before the public as the uncrowned king in their sphere. There also appears the tendency to influence

the listeners by clippings of reviews of performance in India and abroad. The urge for wide press publicity is appearing more evidently as the short-cut means to earn popularity. None of these can, however, be substitute of performance which requires persistent and hard labour i.e. riyaz. The suggestibility of imposed popularity through other means cannot go long.

Popularity in terms of quantitative numerical strength of the listeners might be socio-economic necessity for the present artist but it cannot be the criterion for qualitative assessment. The serious listeners, critics connoisseurs as well as the leading artists like V.G. Jog, Vilayat Khan, Bismillah Khan etc. firmly believe that it is not at all necessary to play to the gallery or lower the standard of one's own performance. One can be popular without being cheap. The most popular artists like Ustad Amir Khan never presented Thumri. Similar is the case with Bismillah Khan who politely declines to present film tune in his classical concerts. In fact, the conscious efforts to run after popularity simplify the compositions and performance for mass appeal lead no where but gimmickery, debased art, performance devoid of depth, dignity and aesthetic imagination.

### **Integration**

The socio-political concept of approach to national integration has influenced some critics and artists, who advance same suggestions for wider popularity. The socio-political technique of integrating different systems of Indian Music i.e. the Karnatak and the Hindustani systems, can bring no result. It is like combining apple and mango forcibly. The various systems and schools are like flowers with different fragrance and colour. Their forced integration will really lead to disintegration depriving of the salient features and thereby making them beyond recognition. The cardinal features can be assimilated by each other. We should pave the way for mutual understanding between the systems and assimilation instead of imposing popularity. That will be more lasting and natural process.

### **Communion with the Divine Bliss**

Classical music is like a holy river. People can take its water according to the capacity of their utensils. Aesthetic experience right from entertainment to the transcendental bliss, depends on the capability, receptivity and enlightenment of the listeners. Critical appreciation of music requires "Samsakara" and "Shridayata" in the words of the sage Bharat. Frequent listening of classical music, may be in Music conferences, concerts or broadcasts, selecting leading artists, will develop necessary taste and understanding in due course. Gradual elevation of the artists as well as the listeners will ultimately lead to the transcendental experience, communion with the Divine bliss as suggested by the sages Bharat, Yajnyavalkya and in the Bhagwadgita.