

Studies in Music: I

Perspective Studies in Music

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This is the first of a series of three articles by Ashok D. Ranade addressed to certain conceptual problems in the study of music. It was felt that an Indian view of these—occurring in the discipline of musicology worldwide—needed to be put forward. Besides, a degree of conceptual clarity would surely aid our efforts at documentation, conducing to a clearer picture of the Indian musical heritage.

'Performance and its Peripherals' and 'Music and Symbolism'—the two other articles in the series—will appear in forthcoming issues of Sangeet Natak. We welcome readers' responses to the series—Ed.

MUSIC CAN BE studied in isolation. It can also be studied as a part of a larger socio-cultural framework. The latter encompassing music-studies can aptly be described as perspective studies. With reference to music three fields of perspective study have emerged as important: comparative musicology, folkloristics, and ethnomusicology. (The last can preferably be called cultural musicology.) The trinity is characterized by certain common features even though individual approaches are adequately crystallized to acquire independent identities calling for individual treatment.

It is however helpful to begin with traits common to the three perspective studies.

1. The disciplines attempt to propel the examination of musical material beyond the actual musical act. In order to consider the broader socio-cultural framework the investigations necessarily move to non-musical areas. A tendency to adopt a cross-cultural bias becomes evident during the process.
2. An intrinsically interdisciplinary approach marks the studies. A permeating preference for anthropological concepts, methodology and aims makes itself obvious.
3. In varying degrees the disciplines display a less direct relationship or concern with the musical quality of the performances involved.
4. For all purposes the studies are broadly polarized between musical grammar and cultural structures. Of the three fields of study, comparative musicology has the greatest grammatical orientation

while cultural musicology displays a heavy inclination towards anthropology.

5. Finally, on account of their overall cultural bias, the studies can be carried out endogenously and/or exogenously. Investigators who belong to the tradition under study temporarily suspend their sense of *belonging*. In fact this becomes a substantive precondition. The reverse is required of those not born and brought up in the tradition examined. For an ideal, comprehensive examination of the tradition, conclusions available from the two approaches need to be brought together.

It is against this backdrop that the three disciplines are to be compared and contrasted in respect of five major notions. The notions are: subject-matter, major contributory disciplines, relationship with the performing tradition, scope for musical analysis, and aims. It may be helpful to juxtapose the positions of the three disciplines in respect of these five notions.

At this juncture an interesting question demands a response. What clues lead one to conclude that a particular culture has adopted the three perspectives in relation to music? The issue deserves attention because two of the three studies described deal with material available in oral traditions. As a consequence those norms usually followed for collecting evidence, facts, proofs, etc. are ruled out. Hence a very basic query becomes relevant. What indicates a *study* of music?

In this context lexicography provides interesting hints. For example, according to *Webster*, study is 'application of the mental faculties to the acquisition of knowledge in a particular field' or 'careful examination or analysis of a phenomenon, development or question'. In the Indian context the nearest Sanskrit term is *Abhyās* which means 'to execute repeatedly'. The term is derived from a root which means 'to approach, go near'—an obvious reference to the methods followed in oral traditions which depended on direct transmission of information, etc. from the teacher to the taught. The point is that the core meanings do *not* seem to suggest an inevitable use of writing and the written word. This leads to the question: to what extent should norms and methods of scholastic traditions, with their conventional emphasis on writing and the written word, be considered essential for study of music? Music is a performing art and therefore it is easy to see that the phenomenon of performance permeates the processes of generation, transmission, reception, preservation and interpretation. Hence clues to the study of music in a particular culture could be obtained if its non-scholastic and performing endeavours were examined.

COMPARATIVE MUSICOLOGY

Subject Matter

Music theories of art-music of two or more cultures.

Major Contributory Disciplines

1. Music theory codified as grammar by cultures under discussion.
2. Scholastic tradition along with standardised procedures of textual criticism, lexicography, etc.
3. Music history.

Relationship with Performing Tradition

1. Close in recurring cycles.
2. Musicological studies usually follow performing traditions. Both to be co-orbital is rare and presents merely a theoretical possibility.

Scope for Musical Analysis

Musical & musicological analysis are the core of inquiry. Items relating to cultural perspective are on periphery.

Aims

To develop a better technical and structural understanding of music systems under study.

FOLKLORISTICS

Musical traditions falling within the purview of folkloristics of one or more culture.

Those employed in folkloristic studies.

Musicologies of related cultures.

Value-disciplines (though engaged in a low-key operation).

Close, though in varying degrees according to nature of genre.

Musical analysis plays an important role while musicological analysis gets a low priority. Cultural items are allowed increasing consideration.

To create an integrated visual of the folk mind to diminish divisions between urban & rural strata in non-homogeneous cultures.

CULTURAL MUSICOLOGY

One or more musical continuity *within* a particular culture considered in its entirety.

Anthropology & musicology of culture concerned.

Trinity of value-disciplines: philosophy, ethics, aesthetics.

At initial stages performance is at the centre. The discipline moves away from performance in later stages of inquiry.

Cultural items are to the fore. Musical analysis is chiefly employed as an interpretative aid.

To develop an understanding of man through music & appreciate the *raison d'être* of music through cultural insights.

For all purposes this position contradicts the frequently held belief that perspective studies began in the nineteenth century. Perspective studies in music seem to have a longer history if the performance-clues available in a culture are closely followed. It is symptomatic that all attempts to date perspective studies invariably shift their beginnings further and further back in the past. This is inevitable because performing traditions tenaciously maintain their continued movements, through repeated acts of percolation or surfacing to new social strata. Performing practices are thus found to have been transferred to new strata and also to new fields of life. Further, performing practices frequently evince a tendency to lie low for a period and to reappear later with atavistic force. It is therefore possible to infer perspective study of one or the other variety from a number of clues other than those in written form. Some of them are discussed here.

1. *Adaptation*: Practitioners of the non-folk media very frequently adapt prevailing folk forms. The process of adaptation naturally presupposes a close scrutiny of the existing array of forms to facilitate selection of features, their placement in new settings and employment of the combination to carry across the changed content to different audiences. The entire process of adaptation is indicative of analysis, appreciation and assimilation of performance features by a number of people over a long span of time.
2. *Listing of Musical Instruments*: An important indication is provided by the non-musicological works of a culture during any given period. Such works are often encyclopaedic in scope and invariably include extensive listings of items, procedures and suppositions entrenched in the day-to-day life of the common people. Inventories of musical instruments therein indicate the kinds of instrumental sounds accepted by a culture and the music-mindedness or otherwise of the people. Most importantly, such a listing supplies a clue to the existence of a discernible hierarchy of musical instruments and categories of sound. It is evident that instruments find a place in non-musicological works by virtue of their having acquired a cultural circulation not entirely dependent on the place of origin or the intrinsic musical merit of the instrument concerned. It is necessary to remember that instruments of music are artefacts as well as objects with symbolic potential. Viewed in a larger perspective musical instruments function as multiple indicators of musical and non-musical patterns of behaviour that govern a particular cultural group.
3. *Scholastic Tradition and Folk Forms*: Folk music exists in a society which enjoys existence of multiple musical categories. Apart from a

near-parallel and simultaneous flow of the categorical musical streams, it is also noted that one of these four categories, namely art-music, is inevitably accompanied by a deliberately formulated scholastic tradition. The latter insistently moves towards codification of grammatical rules governing the structures of art-music of the times. Scholastic traditions proceed to formulate criteria employed to judge musical activity with repeated recourse to dictionaries, anthologies, manuals, etc. If and when musicological works allude to folk musical forms, instruments, regions, areas and the people associated with them, it is logical to deduce an awareness of a larger musical framework as well as valuational placement of musical categories. Further, because of the inevitable time-lag between performance and its appearance in a scholastic tradition, all references to the former by the latter suggest a much earlier occurrence of related performing features.

4. *Description of Musical Events, etc.*: It is frequently noticed that non-musicological works carry elaborate but non-technical descriptions of musical events, performance aims, ritualistic and other related matters, etc. From such accounts the existence of musical categories is easily deducible even though specific categorization is not evident. Further, the prevailing hierarchy of musical forms reflected in the narratives as also the established patterns of describing events provide clues to a highly stratified society struggling to find cultural correlates to music and musical correlates to culture.

5. *Recognition of Regional Elements*: For a country of subcontinental expanse with considerable linguistic variety, it is important to recognize regional contributions as regional. References to musical features, etc. as 'regional' prove that regional identities have been well-established and that the multi-layered character of the musical phenomenon has been effectively registered. A similar acute vision records the diversity existing *within* a single cultural group otherwise perceived as an indivisible whole on account of linguistic and geographical affinities.

A consciousness of other musical systems as musical systems also constitutes an important ethnological insight helpful in determining the existence and scope of perspective studies.

6. *Advocacy of the Purity-criterion*: Finally, existence of perspective studies is deducible from the intermittent advocacy of the criterion of purity of music. It is only to be expected that protests against dilution/distortion/pollution of music are usually registered by agencies partial to the art-music of the culture. Influence of other musics on art-music and the subsequent puritanical objections to them are symptomatic of musical stratification and its consciousness.

Purity and authenticity become the centres around which the conservative forces seem to rally. In a country such as India where all the four musical categories have a long tradition *mutual influence* is to be assumed as an all-time feature. Any cry against the vulgarization of art-music is therefore to be interpreted as an awareness of the power of the other musical currents.

Perspective studies are important because they create conceptual frameworks that are accommodative as well as detailed. Without frameworks of such quality and expanse it is impossible to make sense of the total musical situation obtaining in any society. It is immaterial under what name the studies are carried out. They connote attitudes and all attitudes are observed as well as experienced through the musical behaviour of a society. Perspective studies draw attention to the essential multiplicity of music as a phenomenon and the intrinsic relationship music has with the other, non-musical aspects of culture. Both music and society are heterogenous entities and their respective development are only consequent on acts of mutual influence. To an extent cultural and musical changes can be put forward as instances of a rather paradoxical theory of mutual causation. □