

## **Expressing Emotions in Music**

KAVITA CHAKRABORTY

Emotions are among the most powerful of forces that influence human behaviour. Our emotions command our attention and we cannot ignore them. When we feel intensely emotional we cannot concentrate on performing our jobs as we should, or choosing our words carefully, or even listening to music or reading.

Emotional behaviour is primarily influenced by conditioned visceral responses. Our viscera are always reacting, but in emotion, their reactions affect perception, thinking, learning, and virtually everything we do. All emotional behaviour has several characteristics in common. First, emotion is diffuse, that is, it is able to affect the entire body; second, emotion is persistent, it tends to remain long after the immediate stimulus has disappeared; and third, emotion is cumulative.

It might at first thought seem as if music could be an ideal vehicle for the artistic expression of emotions. For music is an art of sounds and we can express our emotions through the sounds we make. It might appear, therefore, that music is peculiarly fitted to exploit the various features of the audible manifestations of emotions in the construction of works that are designed to be understood as expressions of emotion.

In fact, there are two ways in which 'mere' sound is connected with emotion that music could seek to exploit. Under the stress of an emotion, a human being may produce (i) a certain kind of sound e.g. (perhaps) laughter, a shriek, a sob or (ii) sounds in a particular manner, e.g. slowly in a soft voice, with a characteristic inflection or pattern of intonation.<sup>1</sup> Music has been defined as the art of expression in sound, melody and harmony in which ideas and emotions play important roles.

The psychological impact of music has always been more prominent as compared to the physical or physiological. The ability of music to influence human emotion is well known and used extensively by music directors. A variety of musical moods may be used to create feelings of calmness, excitement, tension and romance. Music can also be used to express emotion non-verbally. Depending on the type and style of sound, musical sound can either sharpen mental acuity or assist relaxation. The fundamental error of the transmission form of the expression theory of music is its separation of what gives its value—according to the theory, the experience it transmits from composer to listener, from the music itself. It represents a musical work as being related in a certain way to an experience which can be fully characterised without reference to the nature of the work itself.<sup>2</sup>

Watson believes that there are three such fundamental patterns in the human infant : fear, rage and love. Watson defined an emotion as a hereditary "pattern-relation involving profound changes of the bodily mechanism as a whole but particularly of the visceral and

glandular systems”.

Titchener (1910) introduces his systematic view of affection and emotion by considering certain problems of definition. Affection is defined as the elementary mental process characteristic of feeling and of the emotions such as love, hate, joy and sorrow. The term ‘feeling’ is used to denote a simple connection of sensation and affection in which the affective process dominates consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

Feeling may be used in a narrow sense to denote sensations of touch, roughness, solidity and the like. Such experiences, Titchener believes, are more properly termed ‘perception’ or ‘touch blends’ and, as such, do not enter into the psychology of feeling and emotion.<sup>4</sup>

According to Schachter, “An emotion is the interpretation at a change in level and quality at internal sensations in a particular context”. Schachter further explained that emotions depend on two factors: (1) Physiological arousal; (2) a mental process by which subjects interpret or label their physiological sensations. The internal sensations result from physiological changes caused by patterns of brain activity, especially in the hypothalamus and limbic system, that act through the autonomic nervous system. The interpretation is a psychological process that seeks to find the relationship between the sensations and the environmental context and that accounts for our subjective feelings.

In some theories of the mind, emotion, cognition and volition were regarded as three fundamental faculties. Emotion came to be regarded as distinct from cognition and volition (willing). We retain the vestiges of this analysis in our present-day conception of emotion: emotion is commonly thought to be the observe of reason, a separate faculty, usually one to be guarded against lest it interfere with the rational aspects of the mind and thereby subvert motivation or values.

### *Musical Feeling*

Emotion and feeling are closely related to one another, they both depend on the brain stem in the nervous system. Pleasure, pain, fear, anger, love, etc., involve feeling as well as emotions, consequently, many of the emotions are linked with feeling. Feeling can be pleasant and can be painful too. Similarly, emotions may be caused either by happiness or by sorrow. Music is the medium through which we express our feelings of joy and sorrow, love and patriotism, penitence and praise. According to Carl E. Seashore, “Musical feeling, like all other feeling, is aroused in proportion to a certain sensitiveness to objects, either physical, mental or ideal. A person who is sensitive to a difference of 0.01 at a whole tone step responds to the musical situation in an entirely different affective way than the person who cannot hear any less than a quarter or a half tone”.<sup>5</sup> Susanne Langer speaks of feeling and its forms thus: excitement and repose, the easy passage of a reverie; sudden activation, perhaps of an impulse or thought, a moment of international waywardness; “precipitate advances and victorious emergences”<sup>6</sup>, the drive and directness of desires, and above all the rhythmic continuity of our selfhood.

*Types of Emotions*

Emotions are more difficult to classify than it first appears; overt emotional behaviour does not necessarily reflect covert emotional relations. "Emotions often overlap and opposing emotions may be aroused by the same stimuli, because of the influence of both heredity and individual learning. Different people react differently and with varying intensity to the same stimuli. However, psychologists, by observing bodily reactions to various emotional stimuli, have identified several emotions that produce similar reactions in different people in the same situation, for example, joy, sorrow, anger, love, fear and hate."<sup>8</sup>

McDougall, a British psychologist, points out that all animals including humans have "instincts" or "propensities" and that when these are activated an affective quality which we call emotion is associated with each.

<i>Instinct</i>	<i>Emotion</i>
Flight	Fear
Repulsion	Disgust
Curiosity	Wonder
Pugnacity	Anger
Self-abasement	Subjection
Self-assertion	Elation
Parental	Tender

The secondary or complex emotions are illustrated by such things as hate, which McDougall defines as a mixture of anger, fear and disgust; scorn, which is a mixture of fear and disgust. Tomkins assumes that there are eight basic emotions or effects. The positive effects are (i) interest; (ii) surprise; and (iii) joy.

The negative effects are (iv) anguish; (v) fear; (vi) shame; (vii) disgust; and (viii) rage. Cattell has factor-analyzed a variety of descriptive items related to the objective expression of emotions and motivations (1957). He reports ten factors which he defines as basic emotions. He proposes that each emotion has a particular goal or aim, and when he combines these two ideas, list looks much like McDougall

<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Lust	Mating
Fear	Escape
Loneliness	Gregariousness
Pity, succourance	Protectiveness
Curiosity	Exploration
Pride	Self-assertion
Sensuous comfort	Narcissism
Despair	Appeal
Sleepiness	Rest-seeking
Anger	Pugnacity

Malcolm Budd considers the following list of emotions :

- (i) Embarrassment is discomfort at the thought that some action or condition might make others think less well of one.
- (ii) Envy is pain at the thought of an advantage enjoyed by another.
- (iii) Fear is distress at the thought of danger to oneself or someone or something one cares about.
- (iv) Grief is acute distress at the thought of the death of someone who is dear to one.
- (v) Pride is satisfaction at the thought at an achievement, or the possession of a desirable quality by oneself or someone or something one identifies with.
- (vi) Remorse is distress at the thought that one has acted wrongly.
- (vii) Shame is discomfort at the thought of the possession of a defect or from falling short of an ideal, by oneself or someone one identifies with.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Music and Emotions*

Emotion can be communicated by means other than gestures and facial expression. The human voice is an exceptionally sensitive instrument for communicating emotion. Tone, loudness and speed of speaking all can act as signals of the communicator's emotional state. Rapid and loud speaking may reveal depression. The fine arts—music, painting, sculpture, poetry and so on—can vividly portray emotions, although we require continued exposure to the arts before we can fully recognize and appreciate what is being expressed. Even then great artists not only effectively portray universal emotions in their works. Emotions expressed by many musical compositions do not need lyrics, titles or interpretations to explain them. Music is itself an expressive language without words.

Words that signify moods and emotions can be used to describe the auditory structures of music because the form of experiences of one sense modality can duplicate the form of experiences of another sense modality. Objective phenomenal structures can exhibit a striking resemblance to the forms of subjective bodily reverberations and in consequence be thought of, erroneously, as the embodiments of emotions and moods. But they do not embody emotions and moods. Rather, they merely sound and look the way emotions feel.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Ragas as the Expression of Emotions*

Ragas, as it is understood in India, is mainly the spontaneous outflow of basic human emotions in the form of melodic tunes. A raga is a basic melodic pattern, whether simple or complex, consisting of several notes—five or six or seven—but not more than five in a fixed ascending and descending order, which may be the same or different. It is distinguished by its own particular sequence of notes, number of tones, characteristic phrases and principal mood. In Indian classical ragas vocalists and instrumentalists improvise in any style, for any duration, and in any tempo, either as a solo or accompanied by Tabla. The quality of a note may be taken to cover the following: its being high or low by virtue of its placement in the bass, middle or upper register; its thinness or richness, tangentiality or penetration,

which respectively mean how brief or how long is the abidance of a particular note, and above all, its expressiveness—gaiety, a sad and yearning intenseness, or a simple soulful quality.<sup>11</sup> One interesting aspect of the Indian raga system is that as the annual journey of the earth through the year brings about changes in the seasons and environment, ragas also move in time to relate themselves to their surroundings. There are therefore morning, afternoon, evening and night ragas, with different moods to indicate the passage of time. For example, the North Indian Basant and Bahar ragas are of springtime. Malhar is of the rainy season.

In order to substantiate this point, let us take a look at the classification of ragas traditionally handed down to us by the eminent ancient musicologists. The classification of these six archaic ragas into thirty-six derived ragas has been normally tabulated as follows:

**1. Sri raga** (Melody of the winter)<sup>12</sup>

1	2	3	4	5	6
Goudi	Kolahali	Dravali	Andoliki	Madhavi	Devagandhari

**2. Pancama raga** (Melody of the autumn)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Suddhanata	Saveri	Saindhavi	Malati	Troiti	Koumadaki

**3. Megha raga** (Melody of the rainy season)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Sourastri	Kambhari	Vangali	Madhumadhabi	Devakri	Bhupali

**4. Natanarayana** (Melody of the early winter)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Vallabhi	Madhavi	Vidagadhi	Abhisiriki	Triveni	Megharanji

*Music, Emotions and Rasa*

Raga can be said to consist of one's identification with the essence in aesthetic enjoyment. A pertinent question that now arises is whether the pleasure that an individual derives from an appreciation of music is *rasa*. It can also be equated with sentiment. *Rasa* results from *Bhava*, another term difficult to translate. *Bhava* is a basic emotional state. *Rasa* cannot be appreciated without an aesthetic propensity—*vasana* and previous *sanskar*.

It is indeed very difficult to find an exact English equivalent of the word *rasa* as it is understood in Indian aesthetics. The nearest so-called equivalent would be feeling par excellence; the eternal value that is felt as an end in itself. Such a feeling stands on a higher level as compared to other feelings which are directed to empirical phenomena. *Rasa* thus may be said to signify a feeling of enjoyment of which there is no direct empirical object, it is a sort of trans-empirical feeling, inwardly directed. According to Pradeep Sen Gupta, *rasa* thus may be said to be rooted in the essence of feeling of the highest order. It is to be understood either as an eternal feeling or as an eternal value as felt. It involves some factors which distinguish it from the object. These factors are: expression, detachment and eternity.

These can be realised, though not necessarily, in the location of any object only as the projection of sympathetic feeling together with contemplative feeling without loss of freedom. Its overall character is transcendental<sup>13</sup>.

### *Emotions and Raga*

In Indian standard literature emotions are divided into nine ragas which are as follows :

1. Sringara or love
2. Karuna or grief
3. Raudra or anger
4. Vira or enthusiasm
5. Bibhatsa or disgust
6. Hasya or mirth
7. Adbhut or wonder
8. Bhayanaka or terror
9. Santa or peace / tranquillity

According to some aestheticians, there are two more—Bhakti (devotion) and Vatsalya (maternal feeling). The following table shows the relation between the individual swaras and the associated rasas :

Sa and Ra	Vir, Raudra and Adbhuta
Ga	Karuna
Ma	Hasya
Pa	Sringara
Dha	Vibhatsa and Bhayanaka
Ni	Santa

Rasa may be regarded as somehow representing the sublimated mental state of an emotion. The factors that form the constituents of emotional action are, in Indian psychology *vibhavas* (the determinant), *anubhava* (the consequents), *satvabhava* (involuntary responses), *bhavas*. Each raga in Indian music is associated with a definite *Ras* or mood. In other words, ragas are understood as the musical vehicle to convey a specific aesthetic-cum-emotional sentiment characteristic of a *rasa*, its definite ethos, its spiritual and trans-empirical appeal. It is this emotive-aesthetic principle, the indwelling or presiding sentiment, which the musician takes to invoke with the help of a unique combination of notes, customarily called the raga.<sup>14</sup>

According to B.C. Deva, some experiments on current scientific lines were conducted by measuring the responses to a few ragas. It was found that they did produce fairly similar moods in all the listeners participating in the experiment, as instanced below :

Kafi : Very affective, humid, cool, soothing, light, deep does not agitate.

Misra Mand : Pleasing a gay, representing light, sweet, deep but does not

agitate, has no feeling of novelty.

Pooriya Dhanasri : Sweet, colourful, deep, heavy, weary, reflects stability, cloudy, sacred, has no vitality.

Ragesri : Sweet, soothing, deep, weary, dark, no novelty, stable and calm.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

Music expresses the unconscious motivation, emotions, feelings, attitudes, conflicts and frustrations of human being. The ideal of 'absolute music' can almost be reacted in the raga system of Indian music when the artist touches the soul of a raga through the sublimation of the ideas and emotion which it evokes. Raga and rasa cannot be separated from each other. For every raga there is some such emotional core content in man's innermost feeling, the depth of which he alone can realize. It is from such realization that music comes into an articulated form of expression through swaras or tones. If raga is the melodic cone or microcosm of Indian music, rasa or emotion is its basic aesthetic appeal which enriches the raga in the domain of art, and infuses life into music so that it grows and becomes an unending process flourishing in diverse forms of development culminating in spiritual enlightenment, a communion with the infinite—the fullness in man. There can be no raga without an accompanying rasa or emotions. This is perhaps the unique feature of Indian music which cannot be found in any other musical heritage.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Budd, Malcolm, *Music and the Emotions*, p. 131.
2. Op. cit., p. 123
3. The exposition follows Titchener (1910).
4. Chaplin, *System at Psychology*, p. 423.
5. Seashore E. Carl, *Psychology of Music*, p. 118.
6. Albert Gnebring quoted by S.K. Langer in *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Vol. 1, John Hopkins University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Printing, 1975, p. 83.
7. S.K. Langer : *Problems of Art*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, p. 33.
8. E. Robert, *Psychology* (third edition), p. 285.
9. Budd Malcolm, *Music and Emotion*, p. 4.
10. Carroll C. Pratt, "Objectivity at Aesthetic Value", *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXXI (1934).
11. S.K. Saxena, *Sangeet Natak*, December 1992, p. 11.
12. Sengupta, Pradeep, *Foundations of Indian Musicology*, p. 110.
13. Sengupta, Pradeep, op. cit, p. 120.
14. Pradeep, Sengupta: op. cit, p. 112
15. B.C. Deva, *An Introduction to Indian Music*, p. 68.