

The Hindustani Music Market Today: The Road Ahead for the Music-maker*

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POPULISM AND RIVAL FORCES

Populism has been the most widely noticed tendency in post-Independence Hindustani music. While it has, without doubt, shaped the musicscape in the latter half of the twentieth century, it has also acquired rivals. And it is these rivals which are driving Hindustani music into the twenty-first century. Populism, by its very nature, is easily understood. The operation of its rivals is, however, relatively opaque. It is therefore necessary to examine populism along with its rivals, so that we may acquire a clearer picture of the direction that Hindustani music is taking.

Independence imposed a major discontinuity on Hindustani music. The disappearance of feudal patronage exposed it to market forces, and converted something that provided a secure way of life for the truly great into a high-risk self-employed profession for all.

As a result, classical music suffered a depletion of talent, along with a decay in the process of grooming the subsequent generations into the art. The great music disappeared along with the giants of the early twentieth century. As a legacy, what most of them left behind was not much more than the bonsai of a banyan tree—very few competent disciples, and commercial recordings, mostly of three-minute duration.

Technological advances soon enabled the creation of a mass market for art music. By this time, however, there were neither enough musicians with strong moorings in the tradition, nor audiences with a well-defined yardstick for judging what was being dished out to them.

These forces gave rise to strong populist tendencies in Hindustani music. These tendencies have, in turn, triggered off a conservationist reaction, which insists on the sanctity of the dividing line between art and entertainment. In the fortification of this barrier, the conservationists have found an ally amongst Hindustani music enthusiasts and scholars in the U.S. and Western Europe.

Hindustani music is now set on a path of irreversible globalization, which has raised fears of its 'de-culturation.' The Indian aesthete must now come to terms with this new reality.

The Emergence of a Market

By the mid-1970s, most of the towering musicians of the twentieth century had departed.

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Musicians with inadequate grooming in the music of the great gharanas invaded the stage. From then on, musicians have been marketing their respective brands of music in a competitive, multi-media environment. The financial rewards of a career in music experienced a significant boost when, in the mid-1960s and 1970s, Europe and the U.S. opened up in response to pioneering efforts by some of India's greatest musicians.

The post-Independence Hindustani musician now addresses an international market of considerable size and diversity. Today's market for classical music consists of 80 per cent 'innocenti', and only 20 per cent cognoscenti. The rewards of addressing only the cognoscenti are now beyond the reach of most musicians, while the risk of ignoring the innocenti has become unaffordable. Hindustani music now finds it profitable to address the lowest common denominator by keeping itself accessible, intellectually undemanding, and familiar. This reality defines contemporary classical music more comprehensively than most professional musicians will care to admit.

Dimensions of Populism

For the uninitiated, instrumental music is easier to handle than vocal music because audiences are not required to come to terms with the quality of the voice delivering it, or to grapple with the poetic element. In the 1960s and 1970s, the formidable musicianship of Ustad Bismillah Khan, Pandit Pannalal Ghosh, Ustad Vilayat Khan, Pandit Ravi Shankar, and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan overtook the giants amongst their vocalist contemporaries in terms of popularity. In the 1980s and 1990s, Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Pandit Brijbhushan Kabra, and Ustad Zakir Hussain consolidated this trend. This is reflected in the growing disparity between the concert fees of the leading vocalists and instrumentalists of comparable stature.

The decline of vocal music threatens not only vocal music, but all of classical music. This has to be so because vocal music is the principal originator of all musical ideas, and also its most authentic exponent. When the originator and the most authentic exponent ceases to attract the best talent, the art-form risks losing its ability for self-generating growth.

Partly because of the ascendancy of instrumental music over vocal music, classical music is also undergoing a melodic simplification. This trend also permits wider reach to a more diverse and less discerning audience profile. Fewer and fewer ragas are now heard—from all musicians collectively, and even from each musician individually. Even in the presentation of common or popular ragas, there is a tendency to simplify, compress, or truncate the form of the traditional, and often complex, compositions. The principles of systematic and comprehensive raga exposition have also been thrown to the winds.

The same shrinkage of variety and richness is discernible in the choice of talas. *Ektala* and *tintala* now dominate vocal music. The *bada* [slow tempo] *khayals* in *jhumra*, *tilvada*, *rupaka* and *jhaptala* are threatened by extinction. In instrumental music, the variety may be a little richer. However, there too, *dhamar*, *chautala*, and *ektala* have virtually disappeared from the concert platform. The enigmatic *ada chautala* is now a rarity in instrumental as well as vocal renditions.

The galloping populism of classical music is evident also in the changing role of the percussion accompanist. *He is no longer in a supportive role to the process of music-making.* Under the guise of securing full-fledged participation in the process, he expects the freedom to intrude upon it to justify his presence. It is in the nature of rhythm to titillate and benumb the mind. Rhythm binds; melody liberates. Musicologist Dr Ashok Ranade has often argued that if this were not true, why would martial and disco music be heavy on rhythm and flimsy on melodic and poetic content?

It would be difficult for anyone to argue that the new celebrity status for tabla players is based on a superior public understanding of the intricacies of the tabla idiom. If this were so, it would have shaped a substantial market for tabla solos. In fact, just the reverse is true. In the 1940s and 1950s, tabla exponents like Ustad Ahmedjan Thirakwa and Ustad Ameer Hussain Khan could make a living primarily as soloists and teachers. Such careers are virtually inconceivable today. With no demand for the comprehensive art of the percussionist, it could perish at the altar of audience titillation.

Musicians and their percussionists are finding it profitable to engage in a musical striptease, unashamedly orgasmic in its aesthetic intent. Instrumentalists—more than vocalists—are now exploiting the undiscerning majority of audiences by selling Rolls Royce bodies, fitted with Volkswagen engines. Music fit for discos now seeks the respectability of the classical platform, and gets it.

Raga presentations now habitually accelerate to a tempo at which neither the melodic contours of the raga, nor the accentual structure of the tala, can retain their respective distinctive characters. Crossing the limits of a culturally defined musicality now merits handsome rewards in terms of thunderous applause and concert engagements.

The Hindustani music scene is hurtling towards the familiar, the predictable, and the titillating. The content of music is fast falling prey to the machinations of expression. A great deal of classical music now challenges the dividing line between art and entertainment.

The Conservationist Reaction

Like all socio-cultural trends, these trends too have triggered off their own corrective mechanism. The tussle between populism and conservatism has commenced.

The populists argue that cultural change is an inevitable response to changing audience profiles and aesthetic values. It is, therefore, futile to question its validity. In the present context, conservatism has to be distinguished from conservatism. Conservatism does not resist change *per se* and is not, therefore, reactionary in its inclinations. The conservationists contend that all change is answerable to a yardstick of 'propriety'; and the test of propriety neither begins, nor ends, with public acceptability. The notion of propriety, according to them, is founded on a society's concern for orderly and evolutionary change. It assumes a discernible link of continuity between the past, the present, and the future. They see their task as one of restoring the quality-control mechanism which has been greatly corroded in recent years, of giving the performing art the benefit of the scholarship that led to the twentieth-century renaissance in Hindustani music, and of protecting the tradition

against the consequences of discontinuity.

Attempts at re-injecting continuity into the cultural process have to contend with the absence of the early-twentieth-century giants groomed under conditions which are now, in retrospect, regarded as ideal. The near-impossibility of reviving the traditional system of hereditary musicianship and highly personalized tutelage is also a *fait accompli*. Despite these limitations, the Sangeet Research Academy (SRA) in Kolkata has proven the possibility of creating an environment conducive to the perpetuation of distinctive stylistic traditions even in an environment unfriendly to the forces of continuity. Another significant experiment was launched in the early 1980s, when the Government of Madhya Pradesh sponsored the Dhrupad Kendra at Bhopal to revive the medieval genre threatened with extinction. This institution has by now produced quality musicianship in significant numbers, and helped *dhrupad* to return to the mainstream concert platform.

There are, indeed, divergent opinions about the SRA and the Dhrupad Kendra as models for building institutions for replacing the traditional pedagogical model. However, the success of these institutions—whatever the magnitude—has stimulated discussion amongst musicians, musicologists, and scholars on the whole issue. This is a significant development in the field of art music.

Another important phenomenon is the receding famine of concert-length recordings of the great masters. The restoration of old, poor-quality recordings has now become feasible and economical. Priceless old music is now hitting the market on a significant scale. Its popularity is encouraging recording companies to pursue this segment more avidly.

Individual as well as institutional archivists, who have hitherto been possessive and secretive about their collections, now realize that their treasures will have no aesthetic or commercial value as soon as the present fifty-plus generation of listeners departs. They have very little time in which to get any kind of price for their labours of preservation. This realization is persuading them to surrender their gems to the recording companies for commercialization. These archives can serve as a substitute, however limited, for quality training, which has all but disappeared. More significantly, contemporary music can now be held answerable to a demanding yardstick of musicianship, which refuses to go away.

Archives, as restorers of continuity, have often been pooh-poohed on the pretext that there is no such thing as timeless music; and therefore, it is impossible to respond meaningfully to music, especially art music, from a substantial distance in time. This argument, however, underestimates the highly creative and complex process by which the enquiring musical mind absorbs and utilizes old ideas to generate new ones.

The education of audiences is gaining momentum. In this endeavour, cultural organizations are increasingly holding public seminars, lecture-demonstrations, music-appreciation courses, and workshops at different levels of sophistication. These are attracting a progressively larger number of participants.

The conservationist movement is now showing signs of becoming galvanized. This phenomenon is best reflected in the activities of The Music Forum, an informal body represent-

ing all the significant segments of the classical music community in the major cities. The movement was launched in Mumbai at the initiative of the scholar-musician Arvind Parikh, and Shanta Gokhale, [formerly] the Arts Editor of *Times of India*, with the objective of creating a healthier climate for the evolution of classical music in the city. The Music Forum movement has now spread to Kolkata, Chennai, and Delhi, and could, one day, become a formidable voice of sanity in the classical music world.

Despite isolated success stories, the magnitude of this endeavour may not be able to keep pace with the growth of the audience population and the dilution of audience discernment. The sheer magnitude of the task is sufficient to condemn it to failure.

The Unlikely Ally

The conservationists at home have, in recent years, forged an interesting alliance with *Hindustani music enthusiasts in the U.S. and Europe*. The Western market for Indian classical music might still be numerically small. But, it has a considerable presence of serious scholars within it, and even the less initiated members approach Hindustani music with respect for the seriousness of its music making process. This sensibility is able to express itself—to some extent—in their preferences, because the size of the populace involved in Hindustani music is not large enough to trigger off the dynamics of a market. If there is no 'market', there is no incentive for the product to pander to the lowest common denominator. In such an environment, art has a better chance of remaining true to its ideals.

In this context, the Indian Music & The West Seminar held in Mumbai in 1996 was a very significant event. Over thirty Western scholars and musicians presented papers and performances. The understanding and respect they exhibited for the essentials of Hindustani music could have embarrassed many an Indian musician and scholar.

The superiority of Western scholarship surprises nobody. The real surprise is the credible challenge posed to Indian musicians by Western performers. Several foreign performers of Hindustani music are steadily becoming household names amongst Indian connoisseurs, especially the Swiss sarodist Ken Zuckerman, the American flutist Steve Gorn, and the Italian dhrupad vocalist Amelia Cuni.

The track record of the international recording companies in producing *Hindustani music* is even better. The Rotterdam Conservatory of Music researched an authoritative contemporary anthology of ragas, and Nimbus, a British label, published it. Navras Records, the leader in the Hindustani recordings market, is a British company, though owned by Non-Resident Indians. India Archive Music Ltd and Raga Records Inc (both in New York), Chhanda Dhara of Stuttgart (Germany), and Makar Records (France) have emerged as serious specialist producers of Hindustani music. Some of these companies have virtually no distribution in the Indian market. Despite the small size of the market they service—the U.S., and Western Europe—their standards, across the board, can make Indian recording companies blush in embarrassment.

However, these are developments at the most serious end of the Indophile movement in the U.S. and Europe. Qualitatively, what the Western 'market' for Hindustani music contrib-

utes by its seriousness is largely set off by the undeveloped state of discernment amongst audiences, and the isolation of the music from cultural meaning. It is, no doubt, significant that the commitment of some developed countries to a serious multiculturalism should provide a strong impetus to the sustenance and growth of Hindustani music. John Naisbitt's "Global Paradox" is with us already. But, it is not clear whether this represents utopia.

India, an uncompetitive exporter of most tangible products, now takes pride in the successful and profitable globalization of its classical music. This pride is tinged with anxiety about the paradox inherent in the situation. Hindustani music, as we understand it, is unlikely to survive without ceasing to belong exclusively to the people of Hindustan. It has become dependent on the West for economic sustenance, discerning audiences, and scholarly inputs.

A significant manifestation of this phenomenon is the number of brilliant young musicians who have become so busy and successful in USA and Europe that they have neither the time, nor the economic necessity to cultivate Indian audiences for their art. Isolated from an active engagement with the cultural meaning of their music, many of them are evolving a musical idiom that recalls the signs outside many establishments during the colonial era—"For whites only: Indians and dogs not allowed."

Under these circumstances, the anxiety about the 'de-culturation' of Hindustani music would be natural and, many believe, legitimate. But, if this process is irreversible, it really does not matter whether these concerns are legitimate or not. How, then, must the Indian aesthete come to terms with this reality?

Responsible musicologists often cite the example of Western classical music, which is tending to stagnate and become excessively intellectual because it has remained insular and parochial. Against this backdrop, they see the globalization of Hindustani music as a sign of its vitality, and a guarantee of its survival. This view appears to have the support of history. Hindustani music survived the second millennium because it adapted itself to the tastes of its new patrons from the Middle East, by assimilating Perso-Arabic influences.

It is inevitable that economics will drive the content and form of Hindustani music, as of every other aspect of a society's artistic expression. Economically, Hindustani music is now being driven by populism at home, and elitism abroad. In both these tendencies, the performing arena allows the music to evolve free from accountability to the Indian connoisseur, who constitutes the principal element of the quality-control mechanism in Hindustani music. Compared to the financial muscle of the audiences that sustain Hindustani music, the salutary presence of the conservationist forces at home will remain too miniscule, feeble, and disorganized to influence Hindustani music in a substantive manner.

Of the two diversionary forces, globalism is perhaps the more insidious because it wields greater financial clout and is also pregnant with a 'de-culturation' of Hindustani music. The impending divorce of music from cultural meaning, and the burgeoning presence of alien musical ideas in Hindustani music are almost a foregone conclusion. If this is the case, the Indian aesthete should derive some satisfaction from the fact that, in India as well as the

Western markets, there exists a serious conservationist force, however small, to set off alarm signals, however inaudible, when warranted.

An enlightened view of the scenario should certainly lament that the great gharanas of Hindustani music have now merged into the 'cocktail gharana'. But, this view should also permit pride in the emergence of a 'Rotterdam gharana', and a 'San Rafael-Seniya gharana', whose commitment to excellence might revitalize Hindustani music, even if it does so in ways we cannot foresee, and in ways some may not readily approve.

IF PEANUTS IS WHAT YOU PAY

Discerning listeners of Hindustani classical music, the *rasikas*, are an unhappy lot. They find that music no longer matches up to their standards of excellence, and that they have been reduced to a minority unable to hold music providers accountable for the quality of music in circulation.

The *rasika's* reduction to a minority has been caused by a steady decline in the price of music to the consumer, and the resulting explosion in the size of the market. Explosive numerical growth has been accompanied, predictably, by a dilution in the discernment levels of audiences. The result of this process is a brand of music that fails to qualify as sound classical music, as understood by discerning audiences.

The process of 'commodification' of high art is not unique to India. Post-war developments in the technologies of storage and distribution have made it a global phenomenon. In the West, classical music was insulated from the forces of market-driven populism by great institutions with substantial government and corporate funding. But, a substantial contribution towards the sustenance of high art was also made by the willingness of audiences to pay exorbitant rates for a face-to-face encounter with classical music.

In India, neither government support nor corporate patronage have had any significant conservationist impact. The onus of preserving thoroughbred music has therefore been substantially on the *rasika*. Not realizing this, he became an unwitting accomplice in the process that has driven quality music out of circulation, perhaps forever.

The Changing Context

For today's *rasikas*, the benchmark is the music that was performed between 1940 and 1950, the tail end of the period often described as the Golden Age of Hindustani music.

In that era, the concert platform was the primary interface between musicians and audiences. The penetration of radio was below 10 per cent of urban households, while the gramophone record had perhaps not reached more than 5 per cent of them.

Other than the patron-employers of the musicians, it was the aristocracy in the major cities which typically hosted concerts. Audiences attended free, and by invitation. The size of the audience rarely exceeded 350–400. This could be partly because amplification acoustics were scarce, and partly because selectivity based on aesthetic cultivation was an inte-

gral part of the musical culture of the era.

If this describes the 'Golden Age' of Hindustani music, we would also need to accept that it offered ideal conditions for the creation of music we consider great. The music world has changed substantially since then.

With the fading away of aristocratic patronage, audiences have started paying for attendance. But, the concert platform has itself ceased to be the primary interface between musicians and their audiences. This shift has been caused by the explosive growth of the electronic media—first the radio and, later, pre-recorded music, especially after the advent of the audio-cassette. If we consider the totality of these trends in terms of cost of music to consumers, we find that they are getting their music cheaper by the year.

The Economics

Let us first look at the cost of concert admissions. According to my information, the system of audiences contributing, in an organized manner, began in the early 1950s, when concerts moved out of private gatherings into large auditoria and open-air *pandals*. The highest level of concert-admission was around Rs 100 per seat in 1961, Rs 150 in 1971, Rs 200 in 1981, Rs 250 in 1991, and settled down at Rs 500 at the end of the last century.

If we apply an inflation-adjustment factor to these figures, we find that a front-row seat of Rs 100 in 1961 is worth Rs 2100 in current rupees. Against this, we are today paying only Rs 500 for front-row seats. If we plot a long-term trend-line on inflation-adjusted data, we conclude that the real cost of concert admissions has been falling by 40–50 per cent every ten years.

Although the average durations of concerts have also been shrinking, they have certainly not shrunk at the rate of 40–50 per cent every ten years. To this extent, it can be proved that even the cost-per-hour of concert music has been falling significantly.

Now, consider recorded music. Here, of course, the cost per unit of time has to be applied to fully understand the economics.

The 78-RPM record, with seven minutes of music, cost Rs 3.5 in 1958, or Rs 0.5 per minute. The inflation-adjusted price of that record today would be Rs 12.62 per minute.

Then came the long-playing record with 44 minutes of music at a price of Rs 22 in 1963–64. The inflation-adjusted price of the LP today would be Rs 9.96 per minute.

This was followed by the audio-cassette with 60 minutes of music at Rs 20 around 1968–69. The inflation-adjusted price of that music works out to Rs 4.12.

Then, consider the present scenario of CDs with 74 minutes of music at an average of Rs 295, and a considerable volume of quality classical music available on CDs for as little as Rs 90. This brings the price of the contemporary CD to Rs 1.20 per minute of music at the lower end, and Rs 4.92 at the average.

Thus, from the 78-RPM record, which sold music at the present-day equivalent of Rs 12.62 per minute in 1958, the cost of music on a CD has come down to Rs 4.92 per minute in the year 2000–01 at the average, and as low as Rs 1.20 per minute at the lower end.

What about musicians' fees? If the consumer is paying less and less for his music, is this

hurting the musicians? This does not appear to be the case. According to reliable reports, in 1945, Ustad Faiyyaz Khan, and Kesarbai Kerkar, the highest-paid musicians of that era, were paid Rs 750–Rs 1000 for a concert. Adjusted for inflation, this works out to about Rs 85,000–1,10,000 at current prices (*circa* 2000-01).

These figures are shocking considering that—according to industry figures—the highest-paid vocalist today is paid 250 per cent to 300 per cent of this amount, and the highest-paid instrumentalists receive as much as 500 per cent of this amount. While this data only establishes a comparison at the top end of the scale, it is indicative of the overall rise in remunerations of musicians, disproportionate to the basic level of inflation.

How reliable are the numbers? I have reconstructed the *price history of concert admissions* and prices of recorded music from my own memory, and the memories of senior observers of the music scene. For inflation adjustment, I have used the time-series data of the Wholesale Price Index, as published by the Reserve Bank of India. Neither of these is a perfect solution to understanding the trends in the economics of the music market. However, a similar reconstruction of history by any other raconteur, submitted to an alternative inflationary adjustment, is not likely to lead to very different conclusions. The orders of magnitude could, of course, be less dramatic.

The consumer pays less and less, while the musician gets more and more. How do the sums add up? Who makes the arithmetic work?

The sums add up because of the role of the two dominant intermediaries in the music market: the recording companies, and concert sponsors. They are both playing a progressively larger financial role in the music market—without having either the need or the desire to promote quality music.

Consider the recording companies first. Their expertise lies in making a profit on volumes. Their strategies are guided by the logic of the popular music market, which is essentially price-sensitive. They have allowed the same logic to work in the classical-music segment because they have found it profitable. It is understandable that they should have no provocation to adopt a different strategy for this small market—reportedly less than 2.0 per cent of the total recordings market.

By treating the two segments similarly in their marketing strategy, they have encouraged the quantitative expansion of the classical music market. But, in so doing, they have also diluted the discernment profile of listeners accessing the music and, thereby, the quality of music that would be delivered through the pre-recorded media.

Now, consider the concert-sponsorship situation. Sponsorship is increasingly being offered by corporate entities for the promotion of corporate and brand personalities. To a smaller extent, this function is also being performed by government organizations towards cultural or tourist promotion. The rewards sought by a corporate or government sponsor are unrelated to the quality of music that is delivered. Their motivations would logically tilt more strongly towards quantitative reach, than the qualitative criterion.

None of the major participants in the market has had any reason to consider the qualita-

tive dimension of the cultural process. While the classical music market is not defined by economic status, it can be argued that music is more likely to attract truly dedicated and discerning audiences when it demands an economic sacrifice, than when it is subsidized. As a corollary, when audiences pay a fair price for their music, they do not need to surrender the right to select the music to an unworthy intermediary.

The Bottom line

In the totality of this scenario, the bottom line is positive for all participants except the *rasika*. Because he is in a hopeless minority, it suits everyone to ignore him and reach out to audiences at a lower level of discernment.

While the tyranny of technology and economics tends to be irresistible, the community of *rasikas* cannot consider itself blameless. It had the opportunity of creating a market segment that demands quality music and is willing to pay for it. This community of *rasikas* happily gave its kids Rs 2000 to attend a Michael Jackson concert, but felt no pangs of guilt while paying only Rs 200 to hear Ustad Vilayat Khan. It also loved the idea of paying less and less for concert-length recordings of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, along with the convenience of listening to him in the comfort of home. In the process, it surrendered the right to choose the music to unworthy intermediaries.

And, now that the consequences are upon them, they are complaining. Audiences get the music they deserve; but they also get the music they pay for. To quote Peter Drucker, amongst the wisest men of our times, "If peanuts is what you pay, monkeys is what you get."

GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS AND CLASSICAL MUSIC

For several decades now, the State and the corporate sector in India have tried to convince us that they have efficiently taken over the patronage of Hindustani classical music from the aristocracy of the pre-Independence era. Unfortunately, such a development is neither a fact nor a foreseeable possibility.

The reasons for this are complex and fundamental. Modern governments and businesses are both managed through a bureaucratic decision-making process, which is, in its very nature, inconsistent with the demands of the patronage function. This reality operates even more mercilessly against the classical arts because their audiences constitute a microscopic minority of the population. The rewards of competent patronage of classical music, therefore, cannot enhance the legitimacy of the repositories of power and money.

If Indian society has substantial funds to divert towards the promotion of classical music, as it evidently has, it will have to find more intelligent and less destructive means of channellizing them than it has so far done.

The Traditional Patronage Model

To appreciate the issues, it is useful to identify the salient features of the traditional model of

aristocratic patronage, against which we might evaluate the credentials of modern institutions.

- (a) *Patron profile*: The traditional patron was a highly cultivated and discerning listener of classical music. In many cases, he was a trained, and even accomplished, musician. He was the sole and unquestioned decision-maker with respect to the disbursement of his largesse—whether to musicians or to other beneficiaries.
- (b) *The patronage relationship*: The relationship between the patron and the patronized musician was a personal one, in addition to being based on a discerning admiration of the maestro's music. In many cases, the patron was a formally accepted disciple of the maestro. The economics of the relationship were designed to free the maestro from all anxieties related to the comfortable maintenance of his personal establishment, which included family and disciples.

This guarantee was implicitly available not only to individual musicians during their lifetimes, but also to their descendants, as long as they lived up even reasonably well to the promise of heredity. Since such support was available to several musicians in the same court, it resulted in a spirit of healthy competition and sharing of musical ideas between musicians from different stylistic backgrounds. In addition, the patron granted 'court musicians' the freedom to perform outside the patronage orbit and to get remunerated for it.

- (c) *Motivations of the patron*: The patron was motivated by two desires. By way of personal satisfaction, the patron sought the unrestricted access to the music of the maestro, perhaps including training from him. By way of public satisfaction, he sought the prestige and prominence within a community of connoisseurs through the vicarious ownership of the maestro's art-asset.

Benefactor Qualifications

With the backdrop of this patronage model, it is possible to assess how, if at all, the modern democratic State or business enterprises might qualify as a replacement for the traditional patron, whose support shaped the 'Golden Age of Hindustani music'.

Let us first consider the *benefactor/patron profile*.

The State and business are both handicapped in the performance of the patronage function by the fact that they are not individuals but impersonal entities, operating under conditions of multiple-participant decision-making. While individuals can be highly cultivated and discerning listeners or students of classical music, organizations cannot. Even a hypothetical organization consisting only of connoisseurs would not nullify this argument because all modern organizations are, in their nature, bureaucratic.

A bureaucracy is, by definition, an organization wherein decision-making is distributed, impersonal, and result-neutral in terms of the identities of the beneficiaries. In such organizations, no individual can have unfettered authority over the commitment of resources. The multiple decision-maker process cannot function with a unified yardstick of discernment. As a result, the modern organization—whether the State or a business house—cannot either be an efficient judge of artistic merit, or commit corporate resources as wholeheartedly as the

patronage function demands.

Let us now consider the *benevolence/patronage relationship*.

Neither the State, nor business houses, can possibly establish any personal relationship with musicians. This is so mainly because personal relationships can only be established between individuals. But, this is also because the basis for the establishment of this specific relationship is a high level of discernment in music, accompanied by a passionate admiration for an individual maestro's art. Such a basis is inconceivable in the context of an impersonal institutional entity such as the State or a business house.

The institutional or corporate benefactor of classical music also fails to fulfil the economic criteria of the traditional patronage model. He may be lavish in his support of specific public appearances of leading musicians; but he does not guarantee to the beneficiary a lifelong maintenance of his personal establishment at a decent level of comfort. As musicologist Ashok Ranade has argued (Proceedings of the Seminar on Content and Expression, Sangeet Research Academy, Mumbai, 8–9 December, 2000), the sponsorship of events is not to be confused with patronage. Concert sponsorship is contractual and event-specific, while patronage is unconditional and permanent. Event sponsorship is a business deal, while patronage is a passionate commitment. The absence of passion in decision-making is essential to the character and success of State and business organizations. This very feature makes them incapable of measuring up to the traditional patronage model.

And, finally, the *patron's/benefactor's motives*. Neither the State nor business organizations can seek any personal satisfaction for benefaction because they are impersonal entities. Their motivations have, therefore, to be understood purely and solely in terms of public satisfaction. On this dimension as well, the two institutional types have similar perspectives.

The arithmetic of public opinion prevents governments, especially in a democratic society, from adopting a stance that genuinely addresses the needs and concerns of aesthetes who are, by definition, a small minority. The best they can do in this regard is to pay lip service to such concerns, while allowing the opinion of the masses to dominate its substantive actions.

Even in the process of acknowledging 'conservationist' concerns, democratic governments are forced to justify the commitment of resources on quantitative rather than qualitative considerations. A music-festival, which costs government Rs 5,00,000 in sponsorship is more successful if it draws a crowd of 5000 ignoramuses than another which costs the same amount, but attracts only 500 cognoscenti. In order to achieve numerical targets, State sponsorship is obliged to support music that caters to the lowest common denominator in public taste.

The perspective of business houses is not much different. Every business house—including its product—is a 'brand' which seeks a premium position in the public mind. The objective of achieving such a position is to enable an easier commercial exploitation of the 'market' so accessed. The sponsorship of a cultural event is, in effect, an exercise in 'co-branding', in which a premium is created for the corporate brand by associating it with a 'cultural brand'.

If the 'cultural brand' has an appeal limited only to the cognoscenti, the co-branding exercise achieves only sub-optimal results. An encashable co-branding exercise is obviously one that maximizes its quantitative reach, independently of qualitative considerations of aesthetic cultivation. Here again, the lowest common denominator in musical values is the more obvious path to success than music to satisfy the cognoscenti.

In essence, the modern democratic State, as well as the corporate benefactor of classical music, have a lot to gain by 'buying' the image of high culture, but a lot to lose by making a substantive commitment to it. If their motivations are at variance with those of the traditional patronage model, the results of their benevolence cannot possibly be compatible.

Reconfiguring Benefaction

The traditional patronage model has faded into history, and is impossible to reconfigure. In its present-day avatars, benevolence acts without the discernment of the traditional patron. But, being genetically handicapped in the area of discernment, it is obliged to legitimize itself by promoting the notion that the interests of classical music are best served by 'popularizing' it. Nothing more self-defeating is conceivable. An art form meant for audiences of high aesthetic cultivation cannot possibly be served by driving it towards populism.

If the experience of the West in handling such issues is any indication, our unseemly benefaction scenario is probably just one stage in the maturation of the cultural process. The West has successfully created great, autonomous institutions like conservatories, opera houses, and philharmonic orchestras which function as centres of discernment and channelize the benevolence of the State and corporate benefactors towards a close approximation to the traditional patronage model. Although these institutions were born in the feudal era, they have made a successful transition into becoming vehicles for modern society's commitment to cultural values.

Such developments have, by and large, escaped India. The only significant attempt to address the substantive issues under present-day conditions is the Sangeet Research Academy sponsored by ITC. In a different sort of way, the Dhrupad Kendra in Bhopal, established by the Government of Madhya Pradesh, is also a significant experiment. The success of these experiments, whatever the scale, has certainly sparked off serious discussion about the ideal institutional framework for the preservation and promotion of classical music. The debate has highlighted the need for a constructive alliance between the repositories of money and power on the one hand and forces of discernment on the other.

There are several hurdles to the proliferation of such alliances.

From the point of view of the State and corporate benefactors, classical music is only one amongst several competing demands on the treasury, all of which are more popular, and in the short run more rewarding. In addition, these institutions feel no need to question their belief that they are, in fact, making a positive contribution to classical music. It is therefore necessary for the community of musicologists, professional musicians, and the specialist media to pressurize the contemporary Indian benefactor into maturing at a faster rate.

How does one educate, coax, cajole, pressurize, chastize and seduce a benefactor, all at the

same time, without risking his disinterest, displeasure and even alienation? This is a task demanding rare diplomatic skill; and the music community has to find leaders who possess it.

PANDITS AND USTADS APLENTY!

What does it take to become a pandit or an ustad of Hindustani classical music today? Some audacity and a visiting card with an honorific prefix! A large number of aspiring musicians in India labour under this illusion and achieve only laughable results. In reality, the plight of such musicians, as well as their audiences, deserves sympathy. A lot of it is good talent, having no way of claiming musicianship above the ordinary, except through an absurdity. And here are audiences, looking for good musicianship, not necessarily of superstar quality, and having no way of finding it except by risking disenchantment.

All this boils down to one simple conclusion. The collective mentality of the classical music community, in this respect, is still a prisoner of a bygone era. It has not understood that we no longer live in a world where a musician was either an ustad or pandit enjoying the security of royal patronage, or was a nobody with his next meal being uncertain.

To use an automobile-industry metaphor, today's music market has a place for mopeds, Fiats, and Hondas, as well as Rolls Royces. It is also a market that allows mopeds to grow into Rolls Royces. What the market needs is a structuring of the different segments—providing the means by which each level of excellence can be brought in contact with its prospects to conduct a transaction satisfactory to both.

Classical music is now a profession. Every profession has a market, which consists of intermediaries and consumers. The profession relates itself to its market through a graded system of value and price. The more realistic this system of grading, the more efficient the functioning of the market.

All India Radio attempts to administer precisely such a graded system of price-value relationships. The AIR system might have become a formidable force in the classical music market had AIR not decided to engineer its own irrelevance by diluting standards and insulating itself from the world outside. Today, it is possible to shape a successful career in classical music without having qualified as an AIR artist. The concert and recording markets are the bread-and-butter markets for the musician. And it is in these markets that the forces of demand and supply require skilful management.

Today's musician is marketing a service to a complex market. The intermediaries in the market include concert and festival organizers, corporate sponsors, and the recording companies. The customers are music lovers who access the musician's art through the intermediaries. As in any other market for services, the supplier (musician) is always vulnerable to exploitation by the intermediaries. The only way to avoid exploitation is for the profession to organize itself for credibility amongst consumers.

The value of a grading system is obvious. It becomes an indication of the value that the

members of the profession deliver, and justifies the prices they command in the market. From the point of view of intermediaries and customers, this becomes an indication of the value they are buying, and of how much it should cost.

From the point of view of musicians, the advantages are even greater. Once they have achieved a grade that relates to a certain market value, and the credible authority of a profession backs them, they can avoid having to negotiate rates for every engagement, and concentrate instead on cultivating their art. A graded system also becomes a ladder, ascending which becomes a worthwhile motivator towards greater effort.

As an indirect pay-off, such a system will replace the informal and inefficient quality-control mechanism in today's Hindustani classical music with a formal and more efficient one. Such a formalized system of accountability for standards of musicianship must necessarily elevate standards across the board. This is the only way for musicians, as members of a self-employed profession, to protect their interests while seeking higher standards of excellence. It also happens to be the most efficient way of protecting the interests of consumers. This convergence of interests is logical because nothing promotes the interests of a profession as efficiently as protecting the interests of its clientele.

The financial clout of an organized profession can also be formidable. The collective bargaining power of a musicians' guild with respect to financial services such as loans, insurance, and medical risk cover, can be powerful incentives for concerted action. Considering the profession-related and other benefits, many musicians will agree that musicians need to organize themselves.

Many might hope that a government body will take the initiative. If the functioning of the government's cultural institutions is any indication, this thought deserves to be dismissed summarily. Ultimately, musicians will realize that the only people competent to set up and administer such a system are professional musicians themselves. They will also realize that the unity of the entire profession backing each graded member offers the best security for the interests of all musicians.

To the extent that government support, or blessings, might be desirable, an organized community of musicians will obtain it far more easily and effectively than an unorganized one.

Consider, for instance, the legislation that gave statutory recognition to the profession of Auditors or Company Secretaries. Both these professions organized themselves into strong bodies before they were chartered by an Act of Parliament.

In the field of Hindustani music, it may seem as if nobody knows where to start. The task is indeed daunting. Establishing and administering such a system will require a professionally manned organization for which the members will have to pay in relation to their respective stakes in the profession. In effect, the stars and superstars will be subsidizing and supporting the rank and file of the profession, as happens in all organized professions. Every difficulty and complexity of the endeavour justifies itself by the rewards.

Today, individualistic sports like tennis, golf, and even chess are lucrative professions

precisely because the professionals have organized themselves, and taken charge of their own grading, and the sharing of spoils. These professions did not get organized after the big money came to them. The big money came after, and because, they got organized and hired the finest managerial talent to attract the money.

If musicians do not organize themselves into a guild, they will remain vulnerable to exploitation by intermediaries. If musicians shy away from defining the yardsticks of musicianship, some modern-day Aurangzeb sitting in a *sachivalaya* or an unqualified journalist, or a TV chat-show host, will start defining them. Media-savvy and well-connected musicians of question-able accomplishment will continue to promote themselves as pandits and ustads and invite ridicule towards the entire profession.

An organized profession with graded membership will, no doubt, make many musicians uncomfortable. Many will insist that in art, there cannot be any objective yardstick of accomplishment. Many will seek shelter under the argument that an organization means politics, a much-maligned and misunderstood reality. The truth, of course, is that an unorganized profession is more unfair to its members than an organized profession. The very purpose of organizing the profession is to eliminate the rewards which the unworthy are reaping from the disorganized state of the profession.

It is fair to ask why the necessity of organized professionalism has not witnessed any concrete action. The main reason for this lapse might be that many of our senior musicians, whose mind-set still dominates the music world, grew up in the era of feudal and aristocratic patronage. A booming mass market, along with the growing power of intermediaries, are unfathomable realities for them. If they are comfortable, they see their success as a triumph of their art. If they are uncomfortable, they blame it on the failure of personal relationships—the anonymous enemy called ‘politics’.

They are attuned to seeing their peers within the profession as rivals. It is not easy for them to start seeing their peers as potential allies, aligned in a commonality of commercial interests. To them, the notion of an audience as a market, and a concert host or sponsor as an intermediary, is alien, and perhaps even revolting.

Although our pre-Independence stalwarts and post-Independence superstars may not see the advantages of a guild organization in obvious terms, they in fact have the most to gain. Once the floor-level of remuneration to guild members has been stabilized at a respectable level, the rewards of the seniors and the stars will accrue in higher multiples.

The stalwarts and superstars ought to encourage the post-Independence generation of promising musicians to set the ball rolling in this direction. For a variety of reasons, the young ones are more likely to provide the leadership for such a movement. The youngsters seek success in a cruel world, and are better equipped to comprehend its complexities. They understand and deploy both competition and cooperation as parts of a career strategy. When these developments will crystallize, nobody can predict. But, thanks to the alarm signals set off by an audacious few, it could happen faster than most people imagine.

Hindustani Music and Two Idioms of Aesthetic Concern

S.K. SAXENA

A widely acknowledged meaning of the word *aesthetic* is 'relating to aesthetics'; and in so far as, historically, *aesthetics* has been generally regarded as that branch of philosophy which is concerned with the principles of beauty in art, all the major ways of our *aesthetic concern*—such as aesthetic attitude/experience/viewpoint, and aesthetic judgement (in exercising which we use aesthetic predicates like *beautiful*, *graceful*, and *sublime*)—have to be considered largely in the context of art. It is true that in contemporary thinking *beauty* and *art* are not the only concerns of aesthetics, and that *nature* and artistic *meaning or significance* are also given due thought. But in so far as our present concern is with the *art* of music alone, lack of frequent references to nature in this essay may well be allowed to pass. What is more, we may not find it possible all along to reflect on the ways of aesthetic concern we have distinguished in utter separateness from each other. This limitation is forced on us by the fact that instead of being concerned with the mere *concept* of, say, the aesthetic attitude or aesthetic judgement, our attempt will be to bear in mind their *actual exercise* as well. Now, when we in fact adopt the aesthetic attitude in respect of a work of art we may well be captivated by it (aesthetic *experience*) because we find it, say, beautiful (aesthetic *predicate*) and happily say so (aesthetic *judgement*). At the same time, care will have to be taken to bring out the individual uniqueness of the ways in question. After all, even the most intense focusing of attention on a work—say, an epic—may not enable one to conclude definitively whether it is to be called merely grand (or majestic) or sublime, that is, whether it only impresses us, if overwhelmingly, or also tends to make us feel elevated for a while.

In this essay we may deal only with aesthetic attitude and aesthetic experience, for the concepts of aesthetic viewpoint and judgement are closely related to art criticism, and so call for elaborate treatment in a separate essay. Now, to turn first to aesthetic *attitude*, we may note that—quite in consonance with the fact that the word *attitude* means *any way of thinking or behaving*—perceiving, attending, and following discriminatingly are all directly involved in the aesthetic attitude at work. This indeed is duly provided for when Stolnitz defines this attitude as that of

... disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone.¹

However, even a casual look at some of the closing words of this quote ("any object of awareness") may suggest some sceptical questions. Is it justifiable to say that the attitude in question can be adopted in respect of *any object of awareness*? It would surely be rash to

say, *yes*. If a patient, writhing in pain, is able to give to his physician a precise account of the nature of his discomfort, may be because he is used to such introspective activity, will it be proper to regard it as an exercise of the aesthetic attitude simply because the pain has been very carefully attended to and "for its own sake alone", that is, quite without any thought of what has brought it about, or of its possible curability? And would not an affirmative answer to this question run counter to the fact that the actual exercise of the aesthetic attitude always leaves us satisfied, or even happy, if not rapturously so. Further, has it actually been found that the attitude in question can be adopted in respect to any (or every) object of awareness? Even if we give no thought to what may occupy our attention in future, have we been able to consider *all* the objects that can be available to awareness in the present?

However, questions such as these need not disturb us; for, I repeat, our concern is only with the *art* of music; and even where it seems to be generally bedewed with pathetic feeling, classical singing, because of the very semblance of feeling it is able to evoke effectively, does not make us sad, but may only satisfy us deeply and even elicit our open applause.

Such consummate singing, however, does not only *require us to adopt* the aesthetic attitude, but may itself easily elicit it, say after the first few moments of vocal warm-up through a round or two of *sthayi*-singing. Here, at once, another question may suggest itself. Is our aesthetic attitude to music adopted *by us* wilfully, or are we just induced into it *by the power of music itself*? The question may be answered as follows, bit by bit, but strictly in light of actual experience:

Those who enter a concert hall are neither equally interested in, nor evenly capable of enjoying classical music. Now, the case of those who just drop in casually and look on music as only a kind of relief from their routine jobs—or as something by appearing to care for which they can raise their status in society—may well be ignored by us, if only because they may be taken to look on music as simply a matter of agreeable sounds and not as a specific art with its own distinctive craft, structural devices, and potential to engage and refine our imagination and sensibility, nay, even our whole personality. In respect of classical music, the aesthetic attitude—even if it is taken to involve only one activity, namely, *intelligent* following—just cannot be adopted by those who are ignorant of the basic grammar of the art. This is a patent fact; yet it is precisely this which is ignored by the definition we chose for discussion at the very start,—a defect which just cannot be avoided by attempts to characterize the attitude in question quite generally, that is, without relating it to any particular art. Why *such* relating is essential can be clarified thus:

Take the case of sculpture, architecture and painting. Here, what the contemplator has to start from is all given to the eye (may be, through varying slants) though its precise or full artistic significance may have to be thought out or visualized painstakingly. In music, on the other hand, aesthetic pace enters at the very outset; and this has to be held on to ideally; so attention, here, has to be vitally mental from the very beginning. Where the art object attended to is a beautiful building or painting, factual details signified by such terms as *front-back, around, side by side, up and below* are all open to perception, though (as in the case

of some sculptures of Rodin) some parts which are literally incomplete may have to be given wholeness by the onlooker's trained and sympathetic imagination. In music, on the other hand, neither *laya* nor *pitch*-differences (which make the notes appear higher or lower) are given to mere perception; these have all to be held on to ideally, this is, by means of a mental effort; so, the "sympathetic attention" of which our definition speaks is, from the very beginning, *not quite of the same kind* here as in the case of the visual arts. There is another subtle difference which is very likely to be missed by those who do not adopt a meticulously phenomenological approach to our experience of listening to music and of looking at the other arts. Where a trained contemplator of paintings finds that in a work, which he is presently looking at, a particular shade of colour does not go well with its immediate neighbour, he will surely feel *disturbed*, but *hardly shocked*, because his expectation with regard to proper colouring in the work (in question) has not been quite definitely predetermined by the picture itself. In music it is different; here, because a definite *laya* has been established by the very opening line (*sthayi*)—of course with the help of, the 'accompanying' *theka*—even a minuscule deviation of singing from the set pace will feel like a painful jab at the *rasika*'s heart. As a knowledgeable response to a work of art, aesthetic experience does not gladden or suffuse our being—or determine or ruffle our relish—*identically* in the case of *different* arts. The *visual* images that the close reading of a good poetic line may evoke are utterly unlike the criss-cross of rhythm within the ambit of a single cycle, or the decorative patterns against the ground of the selfsame *raga* which are both relished *ideally* (yet *non-calculatively*) as the charm of efflorescence, so to say, of a determinate singleness.

How exactly our attention is *directed* in listening to music and how varying are the demands which it can make on the listener is, however, yet to be brought out clearly. First, as the *rasikas* wait for the music to begin, their attitude is just a readiness to receive, not the focusing of mind on any specific object. Yet it is not wholly passive either, because it is necessarily a more or less willed, if not quite unremitting abstention from all thought except the indeterminate one of what the opening recital is going to be. The compere's prefatory remarks at once make the attitude oriented towards the *raga-tala* of the opening composition 'announced'—peaceably in the case the *raga* is a familiar one, and a little wonderingly if it is a rare (*aprachalit*) one. Here it should be clear that if we speak of the aesthetic attitude, quite generally, as just one of sympathetic attention to the object contemplated, we only miss the little affective changes that enliven the aesthetic attitude when it is actually adopted. All along, however, what here persists as the essence of the aesthetic attitude is a quiet waiting for the music to unfold itself—passive (as patient) necessarily, but at the same time watchful; so that, if not the whole-form of the *raga* (if it *aprachalit*), at least the tone of the *swaras* it comprises, as also the requisite evenness of *laya*, are both all along duly checked.

It is also important to see how, barring of course what we have characterized as its abiding essence, the aesthetic attitude varies in respect of its little details in accordance with the individual genre of the music contemplated. Yet, whatever be the kind of music we are listening to, how the performer *looks related* to the opening *swara* or *swaras*—that is,

merely physically or as inwardly attuned—importantly determines, as a quiet working of empathy, whether the beginning of singing will help or hinder continuance of our aesthetic attitude. This is not quite covered by the norm of *shuddha mudra* which only calls for a pleasing or unconstricted facial bearing.

The determinant we have just emphasized is perhaps more pressing in the case of listening to *alapa* of the *dhrupada* manner than where the object of attention is *khayal*-singing. In the latter case, if the opening utterance does not appear to surge from within, the possible lack of its impact on listeners can be easily redressed by the rhythmically formed look of the *sthai*. No such alternative is open to the *alapiya*. As the music moves on, the *khayal-sthai* gratifies the (knowledgeable) listener with its self-completing wholeness; provides him with a definite object for *effortless* contemplation because it embraces a *diversity of swaras* (it being obvious that what is quite without inner differences cannot be easily held in attention); and is happily welcome if the raga projected is not difficult to identify. On the other hand, where the music presented is *alapa*, the listener's attitude is not only one of feeling *interested in* (assuming that the singing is sweet) but *importantly that of looking forward to* what is to come next. There are some seasoned rasikas who feel so satisfied on listening to a well-structured (*khayal*) *sthai-antara* presentation that they may not feel like caring too much for what is to follow. In listening to *alapa*, on the other hand, as it develops by degrees, the rasikas' attitude is at least as much of looking forward to the next musical step as of focusing on the immediate *swara-samooha*. The attitude and the related experience are necessarily open-ended, so to say.

It is true that in its earlier stages *khayal*-singing too shows a glimpse of a leisurely unfoldment of the raga chosen—say, in the way of what is freely called *बद्ध*; but it is too brief, and not quite without the use of words; and so it cannot be regarded as a true parallel of the idiom of *alapa*. What is more, the two genres differ in what they are anchored in during actual singing. The *khayaliya* steadies himself anew (in respect of renewing his feel of the raga-tala chosen) by returning to the rhythm-bound *sthai* after every few *tanais* which distinguish this genre of singing; and so what the listener here experiences is a figuration of patterns *against* a set ground which has its own determinate form. What the *alapiya* returns to, off and on, is only the tonic which surely has a character (because it has to sound sweet), but is quite without *form* regarded as a coherent singleness of *many swaras*. Yet, in spite of the obvious sustenance it provides to the total singing, the *shadja* cannot be regarded as the *distinctive* anchor of *alapa*, just because it has the same sustaining role to play in every kind of singing. In our music as it so far is, every successive note has to relate itself rightly to the tonic which has therefore to be kept in mind all along and in *every* form of singing. The true anchor of *alapa* is only the *raga-rupa* as the individual singer visualizes it; and so, as they appear to the listener, the soothing stretches of *alapa* are no mere melodic lattice-work *against* a settled frame, but the flowering, so to say, of the melodic matrix itself, this is, the raga-form. Here, what the listener is finally rewarded with is the feel of “an intense diffusion, a serene Omnipresence”²—determinate, to be sure, because of the raga's specific identity,

but by no means circumscribed because it is just a sweet ambience and no mere object. One here feels encompassed by or (so to say) swamped in, rather than confronted with what the *alapīya* has been able to conjure up.

Yet, though our actual experience of music and the intenseness of our attention to it naturally vary with the precise quality (which is itself changeable) of what we listen to, there are some features of the *aesthetic attitude* which (are required to) persist in our concern with every work of art. This becomes clear when we focus on the following words in the definition we have been reflecting on: *disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of*. It is obvious that the first of these words, *disinterested*, cannot be taken in the merely negative sense of 'lack of interest in'; for such interpretation will clearly clash with the words that follow, that is, *sympathetic attention to*. The word has rather to be taken to mean, first, that (as Kant pointed out long ago) our attention here is not determined by considerations of reality or actual existence (or occurrence in) in space and time; and secondly, not even by purely personal considerations which can easily take the following forms: 'this is truly the music of the *gharana* to which I am proud to belong'; and 'listening to it watchfully is essential, for it can give me some relevant material for the project I am presently working at'. Similarly, my attitude will be quite non-aesthetic if I began listening with the insistent expectation that, in so far as it is going to be an essay in classical singing, the imminent recital must last at least two hours. Again, the listening will be just as clear a deviation from the aesthetic attitude if it begins with the preconception that the music expected is very likely to be good because its venue is the prestigious Kamani auditorium, or because the performing artist is going to be my own mentor in music. It may seem unnecessary to project such negations to which no one would object; but the fact is that, as in life so in art contemplation, it is difficult to be impersonal in judging the value of objects (or persons) we have to deal with.

Anyway, the word *disinterested*, as used in the definition in question, is to be taken to stand for an impartial way of looking at the art object; and therefore it is quite as true to hold that the aesthetic attitude *has to be adopted by us* as to say that it is often elicited by the winsomeness of good music itself. Both sides of the matter are supported by the actual experience of listening.

But there are two other details of the way we have proceeded so far which are yet to be put together acceptably. If, as is unchallengeable, how music appears to a listener depends (in part) on his (a) uniquely trained imagination and sensibility, how can we say, at the same time, that the aesthetic attitude calls for (b) non-subservience to purely personal factors? The answer here is that whereas what we have put as 'a' directly makes for discriminating attention to what is actually there in the music contemplated, the considerations we have listed as 'b' call for abstention from those factors (namely, emphases such as '*my gharana*', '*my mentor*') which are likely to divert listeners' attention from music's own character to his own individual interests; and that therefore 'b' only (indirectly) supports, instead of colliding with 'a'.

If there is still some vagueness in our understanding of what the aesthetic attitude really

is, the following should dispel it:

Consider how we contemplate a beauteous object of nature, say, a rainbow. We just keep looking at it delightedly, quite without wondering if it *really* exists as it seems to. In fact, we will only feel disturbed if someone begins to explain what really conjures up this mere appearance of the rainbow as overhanging the sky. Here, the sheer delight of the experience is enough for us³. We do not wish to *understand* the phenomenon. At the same time, we do not keep looking at the rainbow explicitly *for the sake of* becoming happy; the delight is incidental. In other words, our attitude here is neither scientific (or theoretic), nor practical; it is aesthetic, the attitude of just contemplating what meets the eye. No extraneous consideration here determines our attention.

It is also obvious that to register the beauty of (raw) nature we do not need any prior training. Nor do we raise any question of moral rightness here. Contemplation of works of art is not so simple. Indeed, as incidental to it, the aesthetic attitude calls for a fuller account, say, as follows:

- a. We may roughly say that an aesthetic attitude, in the wider sense of the term, is being adopted whenever an object is apprehended or judged without reference to its utility or value or moral rightness, or when it is merely contemplated.⁴
- b. This is the attitude of *perception*, the *activity of the spectator pure and simple*, the mental stance and the posture of attention which are habitual in those who have developed a trained skill to appreciate.⁵

Looking at these quotes in the context of our music we may well make some points of value:

1. The aesthetic attitude (of discriminating perception) cannot be adopted by those who have not trained themselves for the purpose; and those who *have* become so eligible look at music habitually as an intelligent and intelligible structure of *swaras* (and as making a specific raga) and not as a mere medley of sounds, however sweet they may be. This is indeed why genuine *rasikas* look for much more in a recital of classical vocal music than mere agreeableness to the ear. They do not register the *swaras* simply as several impressions of sweetness, but as ordered in a specific way and as making a whole of intelligible identity, namely, the raga chosen for rendering. Naturally, they see much more in music than mere *kanarasiyas*; and *their* attitude alone is at once an incipient sensing of aesthetic value, if not an explicit and worded assessment of it.
2. However, it would not be proper to speak of the attitude in question as that of a mere "spectator pure and simple" where the object contemplated is an *absorbing* music recital and where the contemplator is a *rasika*. A spectator only looks at, but does not get into the spirit of (or identify himself imaginatively with) what is looked at. To such a way of attending to works of art our traditional emphases on *tadatmya* and *tanmayi bhavana* would be simply irrelevant; but quite apart from such semantic considerations, is it not a fact that a top class vocal recital, which is not only grammatically correct but also deeply moving, often leaves us just feeling enwrapped in willing surrender to

the music's lingering sweetness? How otherwise could music be said to be capable of refining, in a way, our entire personality, as it surely can, though not without the help of some helpful qualities in our own personalities? The impact of a work of art as rightly contemplated does not end with the overt act of attending; and it is not for nothing that in respect of contemplating a melody, aestheticians have spoken emphatically as follows:

When music relapses . . . definitively into silence, that silence is not nothingness or privation, but possession and fulfilment. When real sonority fades away, then is born the remembered sonority of thought.⁶

It may be added, in passing, that as in Wordsworth's communion with the daffodils, the delighted contemplation of an object of natural beauty may not only keep reverberating, but abide in one's memory, and serve as a recurring source of delight⁷.

3. Yet, there is a good deal of sense in the first of the two quotes we have cited, I mean in its emphasis that the aesthetic attitude is free from determination by considerations of utility and morality. A fervent lover of music will only feel amused or irritated if a hard-headed person tried to wean him from the 'addiction' with the argument that listening to music does not serve any practical purpose. Nor will he buy the argument that the *dhrupada* form is to be preferred to *khayal*-singing simply because its thematic content is far richer in respect of ethico-religious significance than that of *khayal* compositions. However, this is not to deny that situations may arise when we are forced to determine the comparative importance of the moral and aesthetic values, say, *from the viewpoint of social welfare taken generally*, and so may have to raise the question of the possible moral impact of some kinds of compositions of vocal music. But when we are actually listening to some music the wonder if the act is going to be of some *mortal help to us* is just not there. What is more, in respect of our classical *instrumental* music, it clearly does not make sense to ask if our attention to it squares with the demands of morality.

Indeed, so long as our attitude to music remains truly aesthetic, no purely personal or public consideration is allowed to influence it. If I focus attention on a *sthai* simply because it is a part of the repertoire of the *gharana* to which I belong—or because (in virtue of its being a Sadarang composition) it has been acclaimed by many a maestro—and not essentially because of its own character, my attitude will be non-aesthetic (because it is not *disinterested* or objective as impartial). Further, to be truly aesthetic, our attitude here has to be one of "sympathetic attention". The word *sympathetic* in this context obviously does not mean 'being inclined in favour of' (because such an interpretation would clash with what the word *disinterested* signifies), but only *understanding* or *intelligent*. In other words, the overall structure and inner details of the object, here a *sthai*, are to be duly registered. The aesthetic attitude is surely no casual or indeterminate concern; and it is very clearly not so where the object is a work of art. The word *contemplation* reinforces the emphasis.

What art *contemplation* really is has, however, to be brought out. In its secular uses, the

word generally means: 'to go over something mentally', 'to look thoughtfully at something'. Now, where the object looked at *thoughtfully* is a recital of classical music, the 'looking' in question can only mean discriminating listening, that is, a listening which registers *everything* that the music has to offer. By 'everything', I mean here not only the sensed (or merely heard) character of the melody and its constituent notes, but its grammatical identity—which is an object of understanding because, if only implicitly, it is explicitly identified on the basis of its distinctive 'approach phrase' (पकड़) and/or *vadi-samvadi* relation, and so is also distinguished (if implicitly) from other 'neighbouring' ragas; further, its basic pace and the variations within or across this pace; and, above all, the various melodic figurations which make the inner filling of the music, as also its general evocativeness, that is, its ability to suggest some feeling, height or depth, or sheer exuberance. Now, all these requirements of thoughtful listening cannot be met unless the listener has acquired the ability to do so, *and* unless the object, that is, the ongoing music, is somehow *isolated* for attention not only from its immediate surroundings, but (I repeat) from all non-aesthetic—that is practical, theoretical, and moral—considerations. Now, the fact that the aesthetic attitude which is "paradigmatic for aesthetic experience"⁸ has to be cultivated is common knowledge; and as for the *isolation* we have spoken of, it may be understood in the light of the following from Osborne's *The Art of Appreciation*:

Music is a structure built up of artificial sounds which do not occur in nature[,] and concentration within the world of structure which they create is ordinarily so intense that the listener is no longer fully aware of his surroundings [,] and [hence] the intrusion of an alien sound impinging willy-nilly on the attention—such as the blare of motor-horn—causes disproportionate shock.⁹

We may add that *our* music is 'framed apart' for attention also by the cyclic quality of the rhythm as marked on the 'accompanying' drums. However, for a clear understanding of how exactly the aesthetic attitude *differs from our attitudes in real life* we have to turn to the following pointed words:

The greater part of our waking life . . . is lived in such a way that present experience is coloured by expectations for the future and associations from the past. This happens not only when we . . . are planning ahead . . . [but] in our most ordinary and everyday perceptions. Whenever we are expectant, . . . apprehensive, hopeful, confident, or exultant, . . . [;] whenever we become aware of something as suspect, dangerous or innocuous—in all such situations as these we are moulding the present experience in the light of its implications for the future . . . [Similarly,] when we are surprised, disappointed, moved by regret or self-congratulation, soothed by a comfortable feeling of familiarity, or disturbed by a sense of the unfamiliar, we are experiencing the present in the context . . . of a selected past. All such attitudes and emotions are foreign to aesthetic contemplation . . .¹⁰

Now, it is noteworthy that this elaborate account of how aesthetic contemplation is not coloured by anything extraneous is all covered by just two of the many qualifications that

Bharata has used to distinguish rasa-experience: *vedyantaraspārshashunyo* (or being void of contact with any other thing) and 'non-determination' by *nijasukhadukhadiviveshibhava* (or preoccupation with one's joys and sorrows). Be that as it may, there is an unmistakable air of detachment about the aesthetic attitude and the experience it generates. Both differ qualitatively from our everyday attitudes and experiences.

Yet, merely to distinguish *our experience of listening to music* from our everyday experiences is not the same thing as to see what it positively is; and to provide the needed supplement it is by no means enough to consider all that the music itself offers. We have also to take account of its *varying relatedness to the listener*—in a fuller way than we have done so far. The need is heightened by the fact that some aestheticians of note, like Clive Bell and Pepita Haezrahi, look on aesthetic experience as the only true starting-point of aesthetics. Quite a few other philosophers of art maintain that aesthetic discourse (or our talk about art) makes sense only if it is somehow done in the light of aesthetic experience¹¹. So, partly on the basis of the points already made, a succinct account of aesthetic experience (of music, in particular) may here be given, say, as follows:

From first to last, aesthetic experience is importantly an exercise in *perceptiveness* not in the simple sense of ordinary seeing or hearing, but as discernment or comprehension, that is, as a making out. Where the object is a music recital the listener may or may not find any emotion in the music, for this depends as much on the quality of what strikes his ears as on his own perceptiveness; but he must be able to grasp the grammatical and aesthetic character of the raga and its constituent *swaras*, as also of the rhythm to which the singing is set. Acuity of both listening and identifying (though not analyzing) what is heard is indeed the prime requirement here. Such listening, however, is not brought about by any merely immediate effort of the will. It calls for a trained ear and a cultivated ability to focus on even such melodic details as he is not familiar with so far. Such equipment arises from long and repeated direct exposure to music, and willing reminiscence of its more striking melodic details or overall impact, may be even well after the end of actual listening; and it itself gains in quality after every exercise. As a result, the *rasika* is able to register not merely such obvious details as the composure of a seasoned singer and his abstention from *striving* after effects, or the due projection of pivotal notes like the *Darbari gandhar*, but to see, partly on looking back after actual listening, how the *wondrous delight* produced by Bade Ghulam Ali's meteoric arrivals at the *sama*—by way of *tanas* of three clear but very close segments—differs from (so to say) the *sucking of sheer melodic sweetness* (रस के से घूट पीना) provided by his blissful sustainment of some individual higher (*tara*) *swaras* in a regally open *akara*; or how the two *madhyams* of *Kedara* or the *nishads* of *Mian ki malhar* appear markedly soothing when their adjacence is projected as a glide and not as a mere succession of two discrete *swaras*. Such advances in discriminating listening are actively cherished by a *rasika*; and though he cannot show them off to others, he quietly revels in his growing perceptiveness, and feels enriched on the inside. Riches of aesthetic sensitiveness, we may note, are quite as definite as spiritual ones (*daivi sampada*), and though they may not elevate one morally, they cer-

tainly provide a sense of inner fullness and contentment. This partly explains why quite a few of our *gharanedar* musicians, in whose families music has been the sole commitment for many generations, find it possible to bear “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”¹² and neglect without for a moment thinking of resorting to another means of livelihood. This inner, abiding gain in respect of imperturbability of commitment to aesthetic values—which results from the cumulative experience of dealing with music for years—is however not so easy to verify as what the *rasika* experiences during the course of actually listening to Hindustani music. In this context, as distinguished from that of aesthetic experience taken generally, we may finally say the following:

Except in the case of reading literary works, where attention to the very sound of words (as in reading poetry) is never of considerable importance, the starting-point of an aesthetic experience is always some pointed attention to the perceptual details of the object. Yet, however subtle and trained it be, mere perception is never the whole of aesthetic experience. A measure of felt collectedness, arising in part from temporary freedom from worldly worries and preoccupation with the self, is also always there. Nor is sheer vividness of perception, along with the ability to make out what is seen or heard, ever without a sense of satisfaction. What is more, in emphasizing the role of perception alone, we do not provide for the following actual features of aesthetic experience:

... say, its many felt movements; the sense of flowing with, or of following, the course of the art-work [as it unfolds its meaning or form]; the exchanges of being, so to say, between self and the object—for instance, the radiation of being with wonder and delight on seeing a resplendent sunrise; or the suck of the [moving] sweetness of a musical *svara* or phrase that seems to yearn for something far away. Aesthetic experience is indeed pretty often a very rich mass of organized sensations, thought, half-blown impulses to visualize what may come next, and occasional uneasiness at the thought that ... say, the *tara sadja* has not been duly ‘fed’ [—that is, its aesthetic potential has not been quite brought out] or that the *sthayi* has not been ... [effectively] established. What is more, when we admire the expressiveness of a song, aesthetic experience often include the recognition—and sometimes the actual experience [, if only as a passing whiff] of the emotion projected [by, or rather] in the work.¹³

NOTES

1. J. Stolnitz's essay 'the Aesthetic Attitude', in *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, edited by J. Hospers, The Free Press, 1969, p.19.
For a reasoned defence of this definition of aesthetic attitude, see the debate concerning my essay 'The Aesthetic Attitude', *Philosophy East and West*, (PEW) 28, No.1, January 1978, 'Reply to My Critics' (PEW 29, No. 2, April 1979), and 'The Aesthetic Attitude: Reply to some New Criticisms' (PEW, April 1980).
2. P.B. Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, lines 94, 95.
3. See, here, the following from Wordsworth's poem:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man:
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
4. C.W. Valentine, *The Experimental Psychology of Beauty*, 1962. Italics added.
5. Harold Osborne, *The Art of Appreciation*, O.U.P., 1970, p. 24. Emphases added.
6. Gisele Brelet's essay 'Music and Silence', in *Reflections on Art*, edited by S.K. Langer, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 2nd printing, p. 118.
7. Here, I have in mind the following lines of Wordsworth's poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud':

I wandered lonely as a cloud
...
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
...
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought;
...
For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.
8. Harold Osborne, *The Art of Appreciation*, p. 26.
9. Ibid.
10. The view of Stanislaw Ossowski as cited by Osborne, *ibid.*, pp. 29, 30.
11. See, here, the essay 'What makes an Experience Aesthetic' by Michael H. Mitias, in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Winter 1982, p. 169.
12. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I.
13. Anjali Mittal, *Hindustani Music and the Aesthetic Concept of Form*, D.K. Printworld, 2001. Italics and bracketed words added.