

We and Our Music: An Overview¹

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This essay is rather venturesome. It addresses a question of very wide relevance. How is music related to Man? The obvious answer is: in many different ways. A distinctive one of these is suggested by the hoary Indian view that music is not merely meant for concert halls but can be a vital aid to attainment of one's individual spiritual destiny (*mukti* or release from birth-death cycle). As a worldly being, on the other hand, Man seeks to lend an extra measure of joy to festive occasions such as childbirth, marriage, and the harvest season—and to temper the sting of solemn or tragic happenings like martyrdom—by resorting to music (and often also dance) in which generally more than a single individual participate.

The underlying basis of all these different ways of being concerned with music is (a) the desire to be happy abidingly or as often as possible, and (b) to minimize the extent and intensity of pain and suffering in our lives. The former (a) is acknowledged and even emphasized by Bharata where he lists *sringāra* as the pre-eminent *rasa* and *rati*—or *the general desire to be happy*—as its *sthāyibhāva*. As for the appropriateness of collective singing to festive occasions, it is surely common knowledge. What is however not so widely known is the fact that *mercia* and *sozkhāni* (or elegiac poetry/singing) are quite a feature of the Muslim way of life.

Now it is easy to see how our fundamental desire to be happy works itself out through three basic impulses that drive and determine a very large measure of human endeavour. These may be put quite simply as the impulses *to create, to communicate or project* one's seizure or vision of beauty to others, and *to win public acclaim* thereby—all alike ways that tend to make one happy, if only incidentally. Even a very young child feels happy in showing its first random drawing on paper to its parents; and we are quite as aware of the zestful and self-conscious delight that even a preliminary class student may take in just being made a member of the group that sings the daily morning prayer before students and teachers of the whole school. Nor is it any less widely known that on attending an absorbing music recital many a *rasika* feel quickened and, in a way, liberated from preoccupation with their own joys and sorrows (*nijasukhaduhkhādivivasibhāva*) and so blissfully happy, if only for a brief while.

I may now turn to the subject in question a little more pointedly. It is common knowledge that our concern with music is quite variform. Man composes music; performs or interprets it; and also contemplates and enjoys it. There is, further, the attitude of critically evaluating a particular recital or of seeking to fix and clarify the meaning of the basic concepts of music. What is more, one may also look at music in a manner that is quite generally intellectual, say, by reflecting if there is any point in Herbert Read's insistence that music is pre-eminent

among the arts². Now, I cannot deal at length with all these concerns; and though they may all be touched in passing, my emphasis here will be on music *composition* and *performance*, and also on our *discriminating relish* of music. The first two words could perhaps be replaced with the single one, *creation*; for, our good stage performers also improvise quite freely. But, on the other hand, in so far as even our very best recitals are not *throughout* creative, the distinction between composition (or creation) and performance may well be retained.

Let me now turn to the composition *and* creation of music. I here use the word *and*, not *or*; for, though it is common to use the word 'compose' for 'creation' *in literature and music*, the evidence of our *musical* discourse does not warrant identification of the two words. Why I say so can be put quite simply. The Hindustani word for 'composition' is *bandish*. Nobody speaks of *ālāpa* as a *bandish*. Yet *ālāpa* is creative in the sense that it works without the aid of language and rhythmic 'accompaniment' and depends wholly on the artistic prowess of the individual vocalist. So, in the context of Hindustani music, we cannot identify creation with composition.

But what does it really mean to speak of Man as a *creator* of music, that is, not merely as a composer but as a performer on the stage, it being obvious that a good concert of our classical music abounds in moments of unpremeditated singing or playing? I may answer the question straightaway, if a little tightly:

Man here appears as *creating a distinct euphonious presence*^{2a}. His manner of performance, as a classical musician, is not only skilful, decorative, and at times noticeably expressive, but intensely watchful, collected, and yet self-critical all along. In a measure, it is even inhalant, so to say; for, if incidentally, he here cherishes, in terms of regulated melodic utterance and duration, *the form and some* general features of his own experience of what life has to offer, say, endeavour, reaching, or recoil, intricacy and design, or the colour and suffusion of varying feeling, but of course all as implicit and incarnated in his treatment of *rāga* and *tāla* (or *laya* alone) as something to be contemplated. The part objectivity of the process provides for listeners' happy, yet discriminating communion; and its oneness with the musician's own being tends to *refine his* cognitive powers not only in respect of percipience, but as heightened imaginative power and often also as improving insight into the life of feeling.

The key ideas implicit in the above may now be brought out point-wise:

1. To begin with, what exactly is the basic logic of creativity in art? The question is very difficult to answer definitively; but the following general remarks of Ducasse on creation in art appear to be unexceptionable:

Art is possible when the imposed limitations are not so cramping as to preclude all initiative; and it actually begins only when the limitations are not only understood and accepted, but

are perceived as definite and positive opportunities for free spontaneous self-expression. Walls shut out possibilities, but they no less create possibilities. Without walls, one is indeed free,—to spread oneself out thin. With walls, a dam or a channel is created, which permits one's energy to accumulate pressure or to concentrate in a given direction³.

What this extract says fits in with our *rāga* music perfectly. Here, to create is, on the one hand, to keep *to* the grammar of the *rāga* chosen scrupulously, and to keep *off* the slightest suggestion of overstepping into the domain of any other 'neighbouring' *rāgas*; and, on the other hand, to bring about ever newer effects of beauty and expressiveness, as also to evoke semblances of depth and elevation within the ambit of the selfsame *rāga*, which is exactly why effective *ālāpa* in a *sankdā* (or 'narrow') *rāga* is accorded special praise.

However, our classical vocal music as a whole may also be credited with a kind of *radical* creativity. Here the musician has very little (readymade) material to begin with—say, just the prefixed structure of a *rāga* and a *tāla*, and that too merely in idea; and a very great deal has to be done *by* him. This should enable us to see, if in part, why in the past our vocal music was rated higher than dance and instrumental music. In Western aesthetic theory the place of pre-eminence is often given to dance because it involves the whole of Man's personality,—his body, intelligence, and the entire gamut of human emotions⁴. But *our* view could here be that if creativity be regarded as the essence of art, and if, as distinguished from the acts of mere making or fashioning, creation itself be thought of as a quite radical act—that is, as the projection or laying out of even that material which has to be built upon to yield the fabric of art—it is *vocal* music which should be given the place of honour. Surely, the whole human body is not here visibly involved; and the ideal for singing, as we know, is not good *ang* but good voice production or *akāra*. But, so far as the *svaras* are concerned, their *sonant* character, and orderly disposition in the scale—as required by the *rāga* chosen for treatment—have both to be brought about and kept in order by the vocalist himself. In other words, *the artist here creates the very material of his art, and keeps it properly disposed and duly tuneful by means of his own ceaseless vigilance and aesthetic sense*. True, an instrumentalist is also the active agent of the music he produces; but, once the instrument has been properly tuned, he does not have to try all along to keep the *svaras* sweet and orderly.

Here, by way of lending point to a keynote of my view which is yet to be developed, it may at once be noted that, in the very act of establishing (or visualizing, giving voice to, and traversing) the needed *āroha-avaroha*, the singer abstracts and builds on the space-time manner of our daily experience; for the notes are here distinguished as both higher or lower than, and before or after one another. His concern with what I have called his experience of the 'general features of what life has to offer' thus commences with (or a little before⁵) the very beginning of the actual recital. The space-time form, as we have it here, is of course different from the way it is found in our daily experience. Its content is here neither solid things nor everyday happenings. But the thing to be borne in mind is that the spatio-temporal way of looking at experience is vital for, and perhaps never quite deserts our concern with music. Is it not the evidence of actual experience that a whole recital may

appear to be *open and spacious*⁶; or as pulsating with ‘taans’ that *follow* one another varyingly, even like the *svaras* that go to make them.

What is more, the whole of our classical music is creative in the vital sense that the ultimate richness of the entire recital—I mean, *all* its details—are never prefixed and foreknown. What the singer knows at the outset is only the specific composition he has chosen for treatment, and of course the *rāga-tāla* to which the singing has to conform all along. But as for the *details* of the music filling, as against the *general manner* of singing, he just does not know what they are going to be. The total singing, here, is never only (or even mainly) the faithful adroit execution of a set plan. It is rather a kind of genuine growth, punctuated with moments of spontaneous creativity, occurring at times as a direct reaction to audience acclaim. The point is that *the creator himself* is here enabled or impelled to create a little better, in part, by responses of knowledgeable listeners.

2. By the word ‘distinct’ in the very first sentence of my answer to the question, what does it mean to speak of man as the *creator* of music, I do *not* mean ‘having a clear-cut outline’, for that is a meaning which (we have seen) is quite inapplicable to *ālāpa*. Indeed, where what we contemplate is consummate *ālāpa* of the traditional *dhruvapada* variety, the whole melodic presentation brought about has no seeming outline. The *rāga-rupa* elaborated seems to be here, there, everywhere. What I positively mean by the word ‘distinct’ (partly) is that, in our music, where the *daanā* or discreteness of a note is at all required to be manifest, it has to be unmistakably so. No mere slurring of details is allowed. This is *clarity as proper articulation*. It is not a sufficient, but is surely an essential condition of good music. In a *meend* (or glide), I realize, the *daanā* is not there at all. But here it is not *required* to be there. So this is *not* a case of slurred details, but simply an intentional transcendence of discreteness for the sake of a little liquid charm.

However, there is yet another important sense in which all good music is distinct. Though, I repeat, it *may* not seem to have a clear *outline*, all good music as contemplated seems utterly unlike our everyday experiences. This is borne out by the simple fact that the time that we have *in* music is quite discontinuous with, and so is clearly different from the actual time which precedes—and re-emerges after—our listening experience; and, to speak quite generally, what is created by the singer is distinct in the obvious sense of being quite different in kind from the events that fill our daily living. Further, though it always occurs at some place and with some concomitants, good music (as contemplated) has such an intense and individual character that it does not appear swamped in what may actually precede it or intervene the striking moments of its run, say, the introductory ‘announcements’, or expressions of open applause by sensitive listeners. Above all, the euphonic presence evoked is distinct also in the sense that all our classical music is the projection of the *rupa* of a particular *rāga* which our *rasikas* do not generally confuse with any other *rāga*.

3. The next key word (in my ‘answer’ being clarified) is ‘euphonious’ which means

‘agreeable to the ear’, ‘sweet sounding’. I believe that *this* property alone is an *absolutely* necessary feature of *all* our music. It is, in this context, noteworthy that (as has been pointed out in our second chapter) the very basic material of music—namely, *svara*—has been defined by our theorists as something which is captivating in itself. No other word will here do: neither ‘sweet’ *nor* ‘expressive’, nor even the epithets: ‘properly structured or embodied’. And I can argue why I prefer ‘euphonious’ to the other words.

Consider, to begin with, the word *sweet* which is very freely used. Its one clear meaning is pleasing to *any* of the senses, not only to hearing but to *the tongue and smell*. The word is also freely taken to mean generally charming or likeable, or *gratifying to the feelings*. A pleasing affectionateness of tone is indeed the meaning when one speaks thus: ‘I have just received a sweet, little note from . . .’ On the other hand, where a cricket commentator exclaims, ‘what a *sweet* shot!’ the word means ‘effortlessly accomplished’. Now, to secure ourselves against this welter of different meanings, I have purposely avoided the word *sweet*. Interpreted as winsomeness that goes with the effective expression of, say, sorrow or rejoicing in love, it is clearly inapplicable to our music *taken generally*. There is indeed a good deal of admirable music which has nothing to do with emotive expressiveness. We all freely admire a well-structured *sthāyi* or *gat*, or even a correctly played *peshkār* on the *tablā*; but in all such cases the charm is due only to some excellence of structure or execution. It is therefore obvious that its concern with expression of emotions cannot be regarded as necessary for all good music.

Nor are the words, *structure* and *form*, applicable to *all* our good music. We have already seen how *ālāpa* recalcitrates these words. As for *embodiment*, I may just make one simple remark. In saying that *aesthetic* significance is something which is *embodied* in the work we are very likely to be taken to suggest that it is confined within the work, and can be seized by us only through a kind of more or less unnatural effort, whereas the truth (on the other hand) is that every work of art is originally *meant for* an audience or observer.

4. I therefore avail of Marcel’s word: *presence*, with just one addition as a prefix to *presence*, namely, *articulate*. I believe the word *presence* provides for the built-in openness of all art in relation to the *rasika*, the discriminating percipient. Its simple meaning (I repeat) is: what is directly given *and is (in principle) at once a felt influence*. Further, the word in question applies to both *ālāpa* and *khyāl*-singing, whereas the word ‘form’ seems restricted to *khyāl-sthāyi* and *taans*. Nor does ‘presence’, as a word, appear as vacuous or ‘ghostly’ as, say, ‘apparition’ and ‘virtual object’ which are Langer’s favourite words. I may add that, where it is rightly attended to, any kind of *good* music—be it *ālāpa* or *sthāyi-antārā*—is no mere *object* opposed to the *rasika*, *but is at once the focus of a liquid influence which can, so to say, steal into him, and suffuse his being*.

In respect of *ālāpa* in particular a rather subtle point can be made in favour of the word *presence*. If the *rāga-rupa* has been duly brought out and established by the *ālāpiyā*, it will seem to be there, before and around us—and quite real, by virtue of being palpable to our

aesthetic sensibility. To such an evocation of *rāga*, words like *bandish* and *form* will just not apply, because *ālāpa*, I repeat, has no seeming limits. But the word presence *would* be applicable, as indicating the felt immediateness of the *rāga-rupa* worked up.

5. The fact that a singer creates *decorative* tonal phrases or patterns is quite common knowledge. The *expressiveness* of (a good deal of) music is also well known. But what is not so widely realised is that the singer too may find himself sucking in the beauty of a *svara*, so to say, as he tarries sweetly at it. It is in this context needful to mark the way the *svaras* are treated both individually and as interlinked. In the case of a really good vocalist the very first *sur kā lagāo* can be a moment of attunement; and as the music grows, he may not only dwell on *svaras* a little lingeringly, but feel quite possessed by the *sthāyi*'s cyclic wholeness⁷, or even by the full-blown charm of the whole recital, which explains why at the end of a consummate performance a singer may feel not only satisfied but a little weighted⁸ by the beauty and power of what he has himself upreared.

The musician does not merely make the music, but *discovers and relishes his own freedom to regulate the character and flow of the very material he builds upon, and to let his own mood of the moment coalesce in happy confluence*. Thus, he may himself experience a sweet little swing where, through the deft displacement of a tonal emphasis from the beat with which it is usually expected to coincide, he imparts a perceptible lilt to the way the music moves. Indeed, as involved in the act of creating music man does not only do something *for us—the listeners outside, but discovers, exercises and deepens his own inner resources of feeling and fancy*. A good recital is quite *an experience* (in Dewey's sense) not only for the listeners but for the artist himself. *Yaadgaar gaane* (memorable recitals) are indeed the landmarks in a vocalist's career, and he loves to recount them.

6. The really subtle questions that face us here are however as follows:

How does music become expressive? What does the musician express? What is meant by the form and some general features of the musician's experience of what life has to offer of which I speak? And, in the act of creating music, what exactly a musician may be said to be doing?

It is these that I now seek to answer by turning first attending to the word *expressive* in my original formulation:

a. It is worthy of notice that I here use the word to qualify not only music as such, but the *musician's* attitude to music. The basic materials of music—*laya* and tone with its pitch, timbre and intensity—by building upon which music weaves its fabric of enchantment, perhaps cannot *as such* be accredited with any determinate expressiveness. What they *come to express* depends, in the main, on how *the musician* employs them, and this creative utilization must be taken to cover both treatment of details and their interfusion. I find it difficult to cherish the hope that we may somehow be able to make a dictionary of individual musical phrases or *svaras* with their determinate meanings⁹, if any. People have spoken of

the emotional *neutrality* of the tonic. But if, as in a well-knit composition, the tonic comes as the accent of *sama* and if it consummates a shapely *avaroha* pattern, will it not appear to be a distinctly *pleasing* moment of repose at eventual attainment? Again, to take another instance, a nimble *svara-samoooha* does not necessarily mean more *cheerful* music. In fact, if the phrase in question is an ‘ascending’ one, and if it lends tonal form to a suggestion of petitionary prayer, it may only make for a semblance of heightened *tenderness or yearning*. Even tones that are a little tremulous in fact may not *seem* to be unpleasantly so in the actual contemplation of a full vocal recital. (I have here in mind the singing of the late Behre Buwa in his closing years)¹⁰. Perhaps a *tāla* too cannot said to have its own rigidly *set* affective character, gay or serious. Thus even *dādrā*, which is commonly regarded as a light, (and by some) even a flirtatious cycle, may be so employed by a singer as to work up the effect of high seriousness, of course with the help of a solemn verbal filling¹¹.

My own view is that the meaning (or rather aesthetic character) of a note or musical phrase cannot be determined in isolation from its context in the total *form* of the composition or from the intrinsic quality of a singer’s voice and manner of musical utterance. I find it difficult to subscribe to the view (of Hanslick, Gurney, Carroll, Pratt and Stravinsky) that ‘pure’ music has no meaning. But, at the same time, in respect of the bulk of our music, I insist on the inseparability of aesthetic meaning from the (contextual) factors I have just distinguished. Thus, the manifest *firmness* of a *bol* (at *sama*-point) may draw directly from its contrast with an immediately preceding *taan* that unknits itself as an ascent of *easy-going* syllables. Indeed, as Langer insists, a work of art—here, a good musical composition—is *a single symbol* in the sense of being an undividable unity of meaning. Form is essential for (the bulk of) our music; and expression here depends vitally on how the details are internally organized, rather than on their intrinsic suggestiveness, if there be any.

b. But then (even at the risk of a little repetition) we must also be told, quite simply, what *form* in our music is. I may here say the following:

First, musical form is articulate in the sense that the *svaras* that go to make it are all *clearly heard*, not that they must always appear to have a noticeable measure of self-existence. As we all know, *meends* often serve to form the run of our music; and here, though they do not show any *daanā* or discreteness, the *svaras* are all clearly heard. Their self-effacement, so to say, is no mere slurring. They remain *distinguishable* and the directness with which they all make for the flow is merely a matter of how they are embraced as mere hints in the run of a single passage.

Secondly, musical form is a matter of treating the details in the right way. The *svaras* have to be tuneful, and to nowhere flout the technical and aesthetic demands of the *rāga*. Yet when we think of *rāga* and *svaras* relationally a difference may strike us. Every *rāga* is believed to evoke or to express a *rasa*. A *svara*, on the other hand, is said to charm us by itself—*swayameva rājate*—and not because of what it expresses. In any case, if it is taken quite by itself, an individual note can hardly be said to *express* anything, though it may well seem to have a specific character. It is their linkage as a *rāga* that can lend some expressiveness

to *svaras*. A *rāga* is (in principle) an organic (and expressive) unity of some select *svaras*; and this is what makes our music square with Langer's view of a work of art as an *expressive form*.

Thirdly, from the fact that a *rāga* is a wholeness of many *svaras* it at once follows that musical form is also a matter of inter-linking the details; hence the value of formal graces—like *soot*, *meend*, *gamak*, and *lahak*—not only for the structure of music, but for its expressiveness.

To sum up, it is both by regulating the treatment of individual notes, and by employing formal graces which interlink them that music develops and establishes its form.

c. What does the musician (or music) express or embody? Susanne Langer would say, *forms of feeling*. For L.A. Reid, on the other hand, what music expresses is the *dynamics of human responses*¹².

Now, difficult though it be to accept Langer's view that art is a *symbolic* expression of the *forms of feeling*, this is unquestionable that good vocal music at times appears pretty soulful. On the other hand, I demur at the thought that the 'felt' content of music could be generally characterized as 'dynamic human responses'. In the music of maestros like Kumar Gandharva and Omkarnath Thakur, where regulation of vocal volume suggests a rise and fall of feeling, the semblance in question can hardly be called a *response*, for the simple reason that there is here no definite situation to be dealt with. At the same time, I hasten to repeat (what I have already said more than once) that music can well be admirable quite without appearing to convey any feeling. The repetition is warranted by the need to counter the one-sided view, voiced by at least one masterly exponent of *khyāl gāyaki* and quietly shared by many *rasikas* that *sachhā gānā* is only that which makes the listeners tearful.

I have therefore thought it proper to pick the following words which have a wider relevance: 'form and general features of the musician's experience of what life has to offer'. This makes it easy for me to say that music not only utilizes, but expresses (or rather projects) the following: spatio-temporal images or modes (or features) of experience; discreteness, successiveness, continuity; and also forms of feeling *and* the dynamics of human *responses*, say, to what is demanded aesthetically by a tonal phrase just sung, of course in accordance with the grammar of the *rāga* being treated. My argument here simply is that there are many actual features of our music which are not covered by 'forms of feeling' and 'dynamics of response' and which call for the more inclusive concept 'forms of life-experience'. Consider, for instance, the planned avoidance (for a while) of a direct hit at the *taar sāl* in a *puriyā* rendering. What would be the most natural way to describe it in terms of everyday experience? I think, the following, more or less:

This looks like deferring contact with a cherished object, intentionally, so as to increase the joy of its final attainment.

So to speak, it is clear, is to refer to something that occasionally happens in actual *living*. Did we say instead: 'the music here expresses the form of how we *feel* in-or *respond* to-such situations', it would be using words that are rather inapt to the actual, apprehended character

of fact. To me it indeed seems improper to hold, quite generally, that music embodies *the dynamics of human responses*. When, for instance, in the opening stages of good *ālāpa* on the *veenā* we seem to see the swell and ebb of a ‘high seriousness’, the music is just not describable as a ‘response’. The power and the flow are of course here obvious. But the rise and recession of sombre feeling that the music here projects does not look like the dynamics of *response* except in the sense that I have visualized, that is, as the inner aesthetic integration of details of the ongoing music.

Yet a suspicion may persist. Do my words: ‘form and some general features of life-experience’ cover everything that is there in our music? I venture to say, yes; but let me explain:

The *āroha-avaroha* manner, we have seen, employs the space-time form of experience. As a gradual ascent to the point where the *rūpa* of a *rāga* appears to bloom, *badat* is more or less similar to the way in which we approach what we both like and revere, say, as we enter a temple, humbly and worshipfully. A well-structured *sthāyi* is a rough transcript of our everyday experience of a self-completing process, as when we see a directed endeavour bearing expected result. *Taans* of various kinds are essays in arranging, skipping, twisting and turning,—all alike features of our everyday experience. *Aamad* has the appearance of oriented endeavour. *Layakāri as ateet* and *anāgat* has the look of wilful avoidance of what we nonetheless remember, a quite common happening in real life. And to speak quite generally, the musician uses tones and rhythmic beats *just as mindfully* as he deals with things, people and situations to make good in life, though of course only to produce effects of beauty; and also as he experiences life varyingly, as a passing stretch of repose or as a bout of hectic, if pleasurable activity.

I do not for a moment suggest that our music is *quite* without suggestions of what Langer calls ‘the forms of feeling’; and Reid, ‘the dynamics of human responses’. (*Jugalbandi* with the *tablā* accompanist is some clear supporting evidence for Reid’s view.) I even feel impelled to prop the views of these two aestheticians with instances from the region of Indian music. A delightful parallel of what Langer speaks of as (the feeling of) ‘subtle activation’¹³ of a thought or impulse is provided by the sudden rise of an oriented run to the *sama* from a *quite unsuspected* crevice in the fabric of the cycle. Nor would any knowledgeable listener deny that in the region of our rhythm—say, in the playing of an *ajrādā quāyedā*—we may see quite clear suggestions of what Reid isolates as a distinct rhythm of effort, namely, ‘reinforcement alternating with relaxation’. But, I hasten to add, this is by no means *all* that we find in good music. A *gat*, as we know, can be quite good music merely because of its symmetry and euphonious quality, without expressing any ‘form of feeling’, and without intimating any of the ‘dynamic elements and the feeling of them involved in responses and reactions to life-situations’. The case is however quite well covered by the words I have chosen, namely, ‘the form and general features of one’s experience of what life has to offer’. It is obvious that a *gat* builds upon some quite familiar features of our everyday experience, say, its spatio-temporal order, continuity and successiveness, setting out and

attainment, or return to the point of beginning.

d. I turn now to the most general of the questions I have so far posed. What can *Man* be here said to be doing—expressing or embodying meaning, doing *nāda sādhanā* or merely *working up a clear euphonious presence*? Let me answer the question piecemeal:

The fact that ‘expression’ and ‘embodiment’ do not cover *all* that is admirable in our music has already been pointed out. ‘Doing *nādasādhanā*’ is too subjective a characterization of music to provide for its necessary relation to listeners other than the singer himself. Hence I suggest that in creating music man may be said to work up a clear and euphonious fabric of charm, and also to cherish the form and some general features of actual living, by building on *svara*, *laya* and *tāla*, and their variform configurations.

e. The musician’s main material, it is clear, is *heard* (rather than merely notated) *svaras*, regulated of course in respect of both pitch and temporal length. He does not obviously deal with what has been called *anhad nāda*, though moments of silence he surely utilizes during the course of singing. Here, one can of course point out that the *svaras* are *contemplated* as well; and that this is clearly vital for music *composition*. But, I rejoin, it is no less obvious that in the process of composition they are imagined (essentially) *as heard* not as they occur *visibly* in the notational scheme. *This indeed is why contemplation in the creation of music changes so freely and easily into the humming of notes, all duly set in a scale.* My point is also supported by the fact that what is composed is finally accepted only if it also pleases *the ear* when hummed. (In passing, mention may here be made also of the role of *bols* in our rhythm. Without the *heard* character of the syllables it employs our rhythm would forthwith lose a quite distinctive feature).

What I mean by *regulated svaras* at once provides for the place of *laya*, *tāla* and form (or *bandish*) in music. The regulation of notes (in the plural) may be taken to mean not only their being made to appear tender or intense, and the control of their duration and pace, but active concern with how they stand *in relation to each other*; or, with form.

f. But, one may wonder, how is *tāla* in our music related to the form and content of our life-experience? My answer here is ready and brief. Arriving on time, falling a little short of, or just overstepping the time-limit, and deviating from a set routine—or temporal order—of daily activities in a spirit of joyous and wilful abandon,—these are all quite common features of our life and experience; and it is these, I believe, that our rhythm isolates and builds upon uniquely, of course with the help of beats and *bol*-s.

We may note further that my view not only provides for the fact of aesthetic contemplation which no theory ignores, but also makes it seem a little reasonable, if not quite convincing to say with our older theorists that music may well be pursued as a way to self-discipline; and perhaps also *as an aid to seeking after life’s ultimate end*.

I admit that the very loftiness of such a view of music may make us feel a little dizzy. But, on the other hand, it is easy to argue (as Sri Aurobindo does) that our feeling for beauty, which is as clearly at work in our concern with music as with any other art, tends to *purify, deepen and harmonize* our emotions and so can be a vital aid in the formation of a right kind

of morality¹⁴. The point has, however, to be brought out at some length.

Take, to begin with, the way music may be said to *purify* our emotions. It does so, I may say quite generally, by disentangling our awareness of these emotions, first, from self-concern or egoity, so (in a way) universalizing them; secondly, from practical irritants that often mar our experience of these emotions in real life; and, thirdly, from their humdrum concomitants in life as we actually live it, besides presenting them in their intrinsic character, and in a way which is winsome to both sense and sensibility. In real life we surely experience emotions, but here we focus much more on the actual responses they demand than on their intrinsic character, that is, on how they really feel; and, of course, every actual emotion is determined in its intenseness and conative power by the character of its individual bearer. On the other hand, *rāga miān ki malhār* projects our *general* delight at the much awaited onset of monsoon. Likewise, a *rāga* like *basant* visualizes for contemplation our widely shared happiness at the wondrous blooming of flowers and exuberant abundance of foliage in *basant ritu*. Nor does *adānā* represent the valour of any particular existing individual; and of course, there is no question, here, of the gory spectacle of bloodshed and butchery which an actual exercise of valour may easily involve. Compositions in this *rāga*, as in any other, are all duly set in a *rāga-tāla* frame, and so appear winsome, which is probably why our musicians in general are seen to recoil, shudderingly from the very thought of ‘cruelty, blood, torture . . . ’¹⁵

Here, at once, attention may be drawn to some important facts. There is no reported evidence of any of our musicians’ participation in the communal butchery that followed the partition of India. On the other hand, they have been, and still are genuinely averse to all divisive tendencies, in spite of their common tendency to value overmuch the excellences of their own individual *gharānās*. Here is, from the life of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, an eloquent proof of the point I am seeking to make:

The new Pakistani theorists of a separate culture began . . . [researching] for a new definition . . . [of] art, culture [,] and music . . . Z.A. Bukhari . . . [now] the Director General of Radio . . . Pakistan in Lahore . . . began by banning *thumri* and *dādrā* and then *rāgas* with Hindu names [such *Shivmat bhairava*, *Gorakh Kalyān*, *Lalita Gauri*]. Finally, *khāyals* . . . which mentioned Hindu gods and goddesses were not to be sung on Radio Pakistan! On one occasion, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan . . . on Radio Lahore . . . sang his own composition in *Rāga Miān-ki-todi* . . . which means ‘Ram is my own solace. I am your devotee; have mercy on me’. When Khan Sahib came out of the studio Mr. Bukhari asked him, ‘Khan Sahib, what is this Raam Raam? Now think of Rahim [,] Karim’. Khan Sahib was most pained. He said, ‘Bukhari Sahib, you cannot alter traditional compositions. They have to be sung as composed. Forget it now, I won’t sing for your radio station any more, and please cancel my name from the panel of singers for Radio Pakistan.’¹⁶

I may add that even today (*dhruvapada*) compositions built around the glory of Hindu gods and goddesses *and* projecting some of the profoundest truths of the Hindu philosophy

of music are sung freely by members of the famous Dagar *gharānā* who are all Muslims by religion.

It is also noteworthy that music lends the needed measure of charm and acceptability to such ethico-religious concepts as may not seem winsome, or appear just meaningful words to people at large in the course of real life. The thought of renunciation—that is, of bidding adieu to worldly charms—is not likely to carry conviction to most of us, but does not the following composition (to which I have already referred earlier) in *rāga komal rishabh āsāvāri*,

जगत सपना री आली, काहे करत गुमान¹⁷

make the thought in question appear beautiful—and so bearable—if only for a brief while? And in case the singer himself and some members of the audience are already religious in temper, will not the composition in question—if sung with the requisite measure of attunement, tonal charm and repose—at once put an edge on their sense of the relative futility of sensuous charms as against the riches of the spirit?

Just as verifiable is Sri Aurobindo's view that music '*deepens* the emotions and *harmonizes* them with each other'¹⁸. But how exactly does music achieve this laudable purpose? Surely, not in the sense that it actually makes us more hopeful, happy, or sad than we are in real life. The fact, on the other hand, is that a proper rendering of *rāga puriyā*—a vehicle of *viyoga sringāra*—or of *jogiyā* which is required to drip with pathos, (say, as sung by Behre Buwa or Abdul Karim Khan) may make us feel deeply satisfied. Therefore, the *deepening* of which Sri Aurobindo speaks can only be taken to mean that music makes us see more vividly (than we generally do) how actually our emotions intrinsically feel as against their entanglement with situations and responses in real life. Here, because of their impressive relevance to the point I am seeking to make, I may cite some words from Mrs. Campbell Fisher:

An artist . . . may go *beyond the felt thing* . . . [Indeed] if I could be as sad as certain passages in Mozart, my glory would be greater than it is . . . The fact that I know as much as I do of the essence of pathos comes from meeting with such music . . . My grasp of the essence of sadness . . . comes not from moments in which I have been sad, but from moments when I have *sadness before me released from entanglements with contingency. We . . . do not put or read into . . . [great works of art] some petty emotion we ourselves have experienced* and can readily name. *Rather we learn from them what an emotional reality of greatest stretch can be . . . or the calm, the spirit of eternal rest, that comes to birth in an Egyptian statue . . . —such are the emotions unnamed perhaps, but expressible and realizable in art. Those, and not personal emotional excitements, are what great artists give*¹⁹.

Some words in above extract have been put in italics purposely, just because they call for some explanatory comment. Words like spiritual tranquillity and repose (cf. the words 'the calm, the spirit of eternal rest' in the extract cited above) actually ring true only to those who are already blessed with what the Gita speaks of as *daivi sampadā* or riches of the spirit. To

ordinary men and women they are acceptable but superficially,—I mean, just because of deference for those truly religious souls who are generally credited with states of actual experience which the words in question signify. People in general may well be struck by the serenity of a landscape. But how can they may be made to see ‘the spirit of eternal rest’ *as such*, that is, quite apart from contingencies (see, again, the words ‘released from entanglements with contingency’) like the occasional chirping and flight of birds in a landscape which may tend to distract our attention from the feel of serenity just because of their engaging quality? The only way to ‘see’ serenity *as such* is to turn to some landscapes, like those of Cezanne, or to the opening build-up of *ālāpa* as done by a *dhruvapada* maestro.

Be that as it may, music is surely capable of evoking semblances of man’s emotional states in their intrinsic character and ‘greatest stretch’. But here, in so far as we only contemplate them, instead of experiencing them as contents of our personal lives related to or occasioned by specific situations, they just give us a kind of *disinterested delight*. As such—that is, as semblances that appeal to mere contemplation—the different emotions like joy, sorrow, hope and despair are *all alike* welcome to us. This, I suggest is how we may interpret Sri Aurobindo’s view that music *harmonizes* the different emotions by *deepening* them (that is, by revealing their intrinsic character). In real life, on the other hand (I repeat) we only live through our emotions or behave as they require us to do, instead of focussing on how they themselves feel.

What is, however, easier to follow, verify, and accept (than what I have just finished arguing) is the following from a leading aesthetician of quite recent past:

[Today] it is pretty much taken for granted . . . that instruction in music and the fine arts, and participation in plays and concerts . . . [seem] to release pent-up energy, work off frustrations, lessen tensions...and . . . [so] promote conditions of mental health . . . [If, as Russell contended] in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech . . . the love of excitement is [really] one of the fundamental motives of man . . . the excitement of . . . artistic creation [may be said to provide] the highest, purest and most satisfying...[type] of excitement, [and so to provide] a moral equivalent for violence [which feeds on rabid excitement] . . . [What is more,] all shared experience helps to bring people together in friendship . . . If two people listen to the same music . . . in so far as they have learned to make similar responses, they share an experience . . . [In this context] aesthetic objects play a special role in the world. The reason . . . [partly is] that many aesthetic objects are more portable than waterfalls, caves . . . , and . . . [tranquil lakes] . . . [Further,] they represent a quintessence or distillation of certain qualities of experience [like non-utilitarian delight, feeling for symmetry, and the pleasures of controlled imagining], and [so] any two people anywhere who enjoy these qualities have a bond between them²⁰.

Would it then be unmeaning to suggest that if the yearly Dhrupad Samāroha of New Delhi is able to draw quite a few foreign lovers of music to the concert hall, it is perhaps because the reposeful stretches of *ālāpa* serve to relieve a little the strain of their rather

hectic lifestyle; or that it is the postural elegance, eloquent *ang-bhāva* and fascinating rhythmic criss-cross of our classical dances that are bringing different regions of the country ever closer together, if unostentatiously?

NOTES

1. This basis of this essay is the paper title: 'An Essay in Understanding Man in Relation to Music' which I presented to the Seminar organized on 'The Concept of Man in Music' by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, from Oct.3 to Oct.8, 1977.
2. Read here argues as follows: "... almost in music alone it is possible for the artist to appeal to his audience directly, without the intervention of a medium of communication in common use for other purposes".
Herbert Read's essay, 'A Definition of Art' included in *Aesthetics and the Arts*, edited by L.A. Jacobus, 1968, p. 4.
- 2a. I borrow the word *presence* from Marcel. See Ch. IX (pp. 251-68) of the first volume, *Reflection and Mystery*, of his *The Mystery of Being*, Gateway Edition, H.R. Company, Chicago, Illinois, 1968.
3. C. J. Ducasse, *The Philosophy of Art*, Dover Publications, INC., New York, 1966, pp. 38-39.
4. See, for instance, E. Gilson's *Forms and Substances in Arts*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1966, pp. 191-92.
5. Say, in the greenroom, during the preparatory warm-up.
6. The Hindustani words here are: बड़ा, कुशादा. Other specimens of spatio-temporal language that we commonly use in our talk about music are: विस्तार, भराव, पाटदार, लय गाड़ देना.
7. Aided by the *thekā* on the *tablā*.
8. And also elevated, I may add. In respect of meaning, the two words, *weighted* and *elevated* seem to oppose each other. But both may in fact be applicable to the selfsame experience, as in soulful praying. Here, the thought of God's surpassing qualities makes one feel both subdued and elevated.
9. The reference here is to the thesis of Deryck Cooke in his book, *The Language of Music*, Oxford, 1959.
10. As I say so, I recall two expositions of *rāga puriyā* by the artist referred to: first, in his National Programme of A.I.R. which was 'reviewed' by me in *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi) of 9.10.1955; and, second, in the Radio Sangeet Sammelan of the following year, on which my critical comments appeared in *The Hindustan Times* of 2.11.1956.
11. I think I did this myself when I sang the Tulsidas *bhajan*, तू दयाल दीन है, set in *rāga hindol* and *dādrā tāla* at the Kathak Kendra (New Delhi) Seminar of 1977, in the afternoon session of February 12.
12. L.A. Reid, *Meaning in the Arts*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1969, p. 164.
13. S.K. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 3rd Impression, 1963, p. 27.

14. Sri Aurobindo, *The National View of Art*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, September 1970 Reprint, pp. 10,12,16,17.
15. Ibid, p. 10.
16. Malti Gilani and Quratulain Hyder (eds.): *Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan—His Life and Work*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 83-84.
17. I have heard this *khyāl* sung by more than one member of Ustad Chand Khan's (Delhi) *gharānā*.
18. Sri Aurobindo, *The National View of Art*, p. 17, italics added.
19. Cited by S.K. Langer in her book: *Mind—An Essay on Human Feeling*, The John Hopkins Press, 1967, Vol.I, p. 88.
20. M.C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics—Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Harcourt Brace & World, INC, New York, 1958, pp. 572, 574-75.