

Transformation as Creation

ESSAYS IN THE HISTORY, THEORY
AND AESTHETICS OF INDIAN
MUSIC, DANCE AND THEATRE

(Volume I : Essays in English)

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Preface

The essays, or if one likes to use the term 'articles', collected here have been written over a period of about two decades, and have been published in various journals and collections over the years. I have been writing and deliberating about music both in English and in Hindi, and I strongly feel that essays in these two languages are part of the same enterprise; they complement each other and belong together. I have, therefore, also put them together as forming a single corpus, which has been divided into two volumes for the sake of convenience. Those who study music in India, not as 'ethnomusicologists' from the outside, but from within the culture, tend in our multilingual nation, to write their thoughts in more than one language, which, in our country today, is natural enough. Their oeuvre, I believe, should be taken as belonging together. Studying the music from within the culture, I would like to think of these essays as essays in self-understanding. Students who deliberate on cultural phenomena from an 'ethnic' point of view, do not really do so as an exercise in self-understanding. A two-pronged assumption which is debilitating for any true self-understanding, underpins their enterprise : they assume not only the phenomenon they study to be 'objects', but, in a significant sense, the people who have created them are also studied as 'objects'. The ethnomusicologist, thus, does not address what he has to say to the people whose culture he is studying, as he would if he had related to them as subjects, and not objects, but to a specialised 'peer group' claiming to be participants in a 'scientific' discourse, which is at the same time, like science itself, the only and truly 'universal' discourse, and is meant for those trained as experts in the discourse. Those who study the rich musical culture of the west from within, do not call themselves ethnomusicologists,

and, tellingly, they address themselves to *rasikas* and others belonging to their own culture. I would like to think of my own study, as I said, as a species of self-understanding; it is, to my mind, the study of a realm of *puruṣārtha*, a realm of seeking, meaning and significance in which I feel myself to be a co-*puruṣārthī*, a part of the world I am studying. And, in any case, like most Indian students of music, I am not a specialised student of the discourse that is 'ethnomusicology', and cannot be a practitioner of it. This is, obviously, not to decry the spirit of a critical *draṣṭā-bhāva*, the absence of which will defeat my very purpose of being a *student*, and I hope I have been able to keep that spirit.

The essays reflect the different interests I have had in studying music, interests which I am sure I share with those who think and write about Indian music today. These interests concern both the *prayoga* and the *śāstra* of music, and the different ways in which the two can be seen to be related, venturing, as any deliberation naturally does today, into the contexts, the arenas of culture, of which music is a part, especially its history and aesthetics, as well as its ties with other areas of art and thought. They can also be described as essays in cultural history with an accent or focus on music. There are also essays concerning parallel areas, traditionally connected with music, namely, *nṛtya* and *nāṭya*, and their analogous *śāstra*, *prayoga*, and cultural history.

My interest in music began with an interest in its *prayoga*, as it does, I suppose, with most of us, and I began to learn the art as a practitioner. My interest in the *śāstra* of music was more accidental, and resulted through an assignment to work on the ancient text, *Dattilam* (the work was published as *A Study Of Dattilam: A Treatise On The Sacred Music Of Ancient India* by Impex India in 1978). The *Dattilam* may seem rather remote from *prayoga* — as well as *śāstra* — as we understand it today, but it bears a palpable relation with them, because of the remarkable continuity of our musical culture, parallel in this with many other fields of thought and creativity. The study of a text

like *Dattilam* and others, to my mind, provides a greater depth and a broader perspective to the continuing *paramparā* of *śāstra* and *prayoga*, imparting to the *paramparā* a larger meaning and a rich grounding of historical strata, which is usually missing from its vision. More importantly, for me, the sagacity which the *Dattilam* demonstrates in the *śāstric* enterprise, conveyed an impulse of excitement for the enterprise itself. And these essays, which have been written after the *Dattilam*, can perhaps also be called ramifications of that *śāstra*-oriented impulse, though, of course, taking '*śāstra*' in a sense somewhat larger — or perhaps more 'scattered' and 'dissipated' — than that of *ācārya* Dattila.

There is in this collection an essay entitled, 'Why Study Ancient Musical Texts'; in a sense, many of the following essays can be understood as answers to this question, although the particular essay I refer to, was not written with the idea of composing such a theme-paper in mind. But just as the *prayoga* of others inspires a practitioner to an independent *prayoga* of one's own, a study of *śāstra* leads to independent thought. Some of the essays collected here, I hope, bear the stamp of such thinking. These may not be, as I said, exactly classifiable as belonging to the category of what we know as *śāstra* in *saṅgīta*, but *śāstra* is grounded in a spirit of reflection, and that certainly is as open to new ventures as music itself. In *saṅgīta-śāstra*, as in 'musicology', the *śāstric* venture is traditionally tied down to *lakṣaṇa*, or, roughly speaking, a mapping of *prayoga*. The *śāstra* has a set of categories and devices of its own, which are thought of as embedded in the logic of knowledge itself, and which it brings to bear on an area of study such as the *prayoga* of *saṅgīta*, the *śāstra* of *saṅgīta*, or 'musicology', thus being logos, or thought, as it relates to music. But music can be said to have a logos, a *prajñā* of its own. It runs as deep as a universal human *puruṣārtha* as thought. Confucius, indeed, as opposed to Aristotle, defined man through music and not reason or thought. If this be so, the *śāstra* related to *saṅgīta*, the logos of music, need not only be *about* music, it can also be thought that thinks *through* music. Pythagoras, Confucius and the ancient singers of

Sāmaveda, were, I think, practioners of *saṅgīta-śāstra* in this sense. This, in a way, which might appear paradoxical, turns the table on the *śāstra-prayoga* relation, envisioning *prayoga* itself as a *śāstra*, a species of reflection or thought. But this should not appear strange, since music is a reflective activity of its own kind. It can be as profound an 'index of culture' as thought, as many thinkers have, indeed, taken it to be. The final essay of this volume of the collection of essays in English, contains a longish piece in two parts, entitled, 'Reflections On The Logos Of Music', which is an essay in looking at music itself as being imbued with logos. The essay was specially written for this collection.

There are numerous friends, colleagues and *gurus* to whom I must offer thanks. For me, they form the *sampradāya* within which I have written. The best way I can think of to acknowledge their debt is to offer this *vidyā-sampradāya* a *namaskāra* which, I hope, will also act as a *maṅgala* for the book itself.

I must, however, offer special thanks to Pradeep Goel of Aditya Prakashan who has published this book, for his extreme patience with me. He has waited for months for me to give final form to the book and write the final essay.

CHAPTER – ONE

The 'Modern', the 'Traditional' and Criticism in the Indian Musical Tradition

The word 'modern', and by implication the word 'traditional', are used in two very distinct senses today: an old sense, and one which is very much more recent. This dual use creates a basic confusion concerning modernity and tradition in the Indian context. I will attempt to show how it does so in the field of the arts, causing a strange mixing of categories. I shall then move on to discuss how the notion of *paramparā*, the Indian word for tradition, is articulated in India and the role assigned to criticism in it, before outlining a brief history of criticism in the *paramparā* of music.

The old, original sense of the word, 'modern', is a relative sense. The new meaning attached to it may, by contrast, be termed, 'absolute'. In both senses 'modern' is opposed to the 'traditional', that is, the old and established which it replaces. In the relative sense of modern, a living and dynamic continuity is maintained between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. The modern, in this sense, is but a phase of an unbroken tradition which it transforms, and with the coming of a newer phase, a newer modern, it can itself become old and traditional. And so, today we have the phenomenon called post-modernism in the west where the tradition does flow into a newer modern. The Sanskrit analogue of such usage is the relative opposition between the *purātana* or *praciṇa* and the *navya* or *nūtana*.

The other, the 'absolute' use of the term, is a new western coinage. It is based on a new world-view and imparts a heavily meaning-loaded sense to what was, traditionally, a simple, innocuous word. It has no analogue in Sanskrit. The word, 'ādhunika' has been coined for it in many Indian languages. The world-view it is rooted in, is an all-embracing vision about man, his Destiny, and the nature of history and change. There are

differing strands within the world-view, but that does not disturb the over-all picture. The spread of westernisation over the globe has made this world-view a near-dogma, turning 'modern' in its new sense, into a global cultural catch-word.

There is according to this view, a clear 'axial' break in history between the old, the traditional, and the 'modern'. With the 'modern', history has moved into a new, higher gear, arriving at a new categorically advanced civilisation which is no less than a quantum leap forward from the old and traditional. The spirit of the new 'modern' is not limited to a particular discipline or pursuit, but constitutes a total cultural quality that pervades every aspect of man: his institutions as well as his consciousness. The roots of the 'modern' may lie in the phenomenal advances in science and technology, but it pervades human life in all its aspects, encompassing social, political and economic institutions as well as art and thought and the very stuff of our experience. It is a completely new civilisation.

There are said to be certain deep-rooted historical reasons due to which the new 'modern' was born in the west, where to use a metaphor from ancient Indian cosmogony, a 'womb' was ready and waiting for it. Historical forces are complex things but if one were to look for a single cause for the emergence of the 'modern' in the west, it would not be difficult to point at it: the new 'modern' is the fruition of the rational, critical spirit, a unique gift of the Greeks to the west.

But though born in the west, the 'modern' civilisation is universal in essence and intent. It is, as it should only be, an evangelical civilisation. Like the 'universal' Roman empire, or a true messianic religion, it has spread beyond its boundaries, first through violence and conquest; but now its violent phase is over. The seed has spread over the world and every country must nurture it on its own. The 'modern' has become a truly 'international' civilisation, the first in history; though being a produce of the west, the leadership, the inspiration, the very form of this 'international' civilisation naturally remains western. The 'international' is, in other words equivalent to the 'modern'.

Though, of course, the word 'international' could be more acceptable to those self-respecting non-western people who find 'modern' too western and alien.

The rootedness of the 'modern' in the west results in what might seem a paradoxical situation: for though the modern is a categorical break from the tradition, it is yet a vital part of the western tradition; the continuity between the 'modern' and the 'traditional' remains intact in the west. But this is not possible anywhere else. Given the historical circumstances, the situation is only natural, though it might seem strange and parochial. The 'modern' is, after all, a break from the western past out of which it has emerged and with which it has dynamic links.

As a result, the 'modern', though an absolutely new civilisation for the rest of the world, is only relatively new to the west itself, since the west has a continuity of tradition. This continuity perhaps appears more evident in certain areas, like art and thought, but it is, in truth, all-pervasive. Indeed, one major task of history is to reveal the vital links between the old and the new in the west, showing how the 'modern' is a *pariṇāma*, a transformation of the tradition itself.

Other civilisations may also have had a development of their own; that is to say, they may have their own traditions, but however rich these traditions may be, they could not have produced the 'modern'; they were not impregnated with it. Such civilisations, such as that of India, are, therefore, essentially 'traditional'. Except, of course, in areas where the new 'modern' from the west has replaced the tradition. The 'modern', for this reason, in essentially 'traditional' civilisations means a categorical break with the past, the giving up of tradition.

Like all historical processes, 'modernity' takes time to set in. The old takes time to die and be entirely replaced by the new. As a result, 'traditional' civilisations are condemned to harbour two disparate streams of development for some time: one, their own, the 'traditional' and the other, the 'modern', till they become entirely 'modernised'.

We, in India, have certainly become 'modernised' in the

primary sense that we have accepted the new absolute meaning of 'modern' as the true meaning of the word. This implies the ingestion of the historical picture too, which the meaning is embedded in. The proofs of this lie in every field of our life. We make a distinction, which we consider very significant, between a 'traditional' and a 'modern' in what we do, the 'traditional' being the Indian and the 'modern', the western or western-inspired. In fact, we live in two civilisations, the 'modern' and the 'traditional', as we march bravely towards complete 'modernisation'.

But meanwhile we must bear with a 'traditional' along with a 'modern' in almost everything. This is only to be expected. Let us take the arts. The 'traditional' exists with the 'modern' in most of the arts: painting, sculpture and architecture, for example. We have a well-entrenched, western-inspired 'modern' in these arts, though the 'traditional' also persists. But the 'traditional' has been put in its place. It is on the way out. We are preserving it as a relic of the past, even sometimes as a living relic, but its value is that of something in a museum. And this is how it should be.

What is perturbing, however, is the fact that we have no 'modern' in music and dance. All we have is 'traditional'. And what is more, there seems to be no real prospect of having a 'modern' in these arts. Our sensibilities fail to respond to 'modern', that is, western music, except, may be, in forms that cannot be called the deepest expressions of the musical sensibilities of the west. How, then, can we have a 'modern' in music?

The question does bother us 'moderns' sometimes and leaves us perplexed. We can, of course, dismiss the question saying that a taste in music like our taste in food is traditional; this need not cause us much concern as long as we are 'modern' in what really matters. This, plainly, is too facile to satisfy anyone with any sensibility. And the 'modern', moreover, is a total civilisation, on what ground can we exclude music from it, especially since we do have a 'modern' in the other arts. We cannot but be worried for our failure to have a 'modern' in music, blaming this

lapse, perhaps, on our love for 'traditional' music, a stubborn hangover from a past which still clouds our consciousness.

But let us reflect. Is not our perplexity a result of a confusion of categories, a verbal *moha*? We are prepared to grant that within its own tradition, our music has been growing as vitally as western music within *its* own tradition, yet we never even consider calling it 'modern'. We have accepted the new, western, absolute meaning of 'modern' as the true meaning of the term along with the historical myth which makes this meaning so overwhelmingly momentous. We fail to notice the significance of the fact that the west, in its own case, persists in using the original relative meaning of the word 'modern' and its historians are busy looking for the seeds for everything new in the old.

The reason is not difficult to comprehend. The word 'modern' does not mean something created out of the void. It presupposes a cultural framework, human activity with an organised continuity, in other words, a tradition. The modern is a new transformation of this tradition; without it the word itself would be meaningless. Cultural traditions are many and they have nurtured many 'moderns' and unless we allow the 'international' to triumph, there is no reason why there should not be a multiplicity of them in the future: different 'moderns' in different cultures. The new western 'modern' claims a special, unique, monolithic status, which its historical destiny has granted it — and which we, too, gullibly seem to be granting it — of being global in intent, even though its tradition is localised in the west. Anything not linked with the west cannot be 'modern' in this scheme, by definition.

It is not strange, therefore, that in whatever we have become 'modern', in painting, sculpture, architecture — and even thought — the tradition which we belong to is no longer our own, but the western tradition. The history of modern painting, sculpture, architecture or thought in India has hardly anything to do with India beyond a short period, after which it has to jump to the west, its real home. And, conversely — or rather perversely — anything which cannot trace its history to the west, like Indian

music, dance or — the continuities in our thought — remains 'traditional'. Now the 'traditional by virtue of the meaning of the term is lacking in true appropriate vitality — even though it might be doing new things in its own way — which only the 'modern' has. This is what perturbs us about Indian music. The cause, plainly, is a verbal *moha*.

There are other undesirable consequences of this *moha*. Having equated the 'traditional' with the 'dead' or the 'dying', we have condemned our traditions in painting, sculpture, architecture and thought as devoid of vitality. And having made this judgement, we feel justified in allowing them a kind of secondary existence, till they really breathe their last.

Yet the 'modern' too disturbs many of us. For we have lost our own identity in whatever we are 'modern'. Calling the 'modern' international, does perhaps provide a face-saving device for some, but these do not care for an identity in any case. Those who do, feel that though we have lost an identity and given up a whole rich and long tradition, all we have gained in return is the status of a cultural province of the west. A status which does not deserve serious attention in itself; its life-sources, its mainsprings lie elsewhere. It has nothing really of its own to offer. It may have some individuality, but all provincial growth has it. India, perhaps, has a little more of it; it has had, after all, a long tradition of its own, a tradition which still flows inertly along as a parallel civilisation. This is what gives India its individuality, but this is not something necessarily good. For the tradition, truly, is a hurdle in India's path to modernity which would have been straighter without such a complex, cumbersome tradition.

One major reason why India's tradition, indeed, all that is 'traditional', is a hurdle to modernity, is its lack of the critical spirit. Tradition is accepted and perpetuated largely through faith or unthinking convention.

This is tradition as modernity sees it. But let us see how the tradition understands itself. For, tradition, thus understood, is *not* synonymous with the Indian notion of *paramparā*, the Indian

equivalent of 'tradition'. Accepted uncritically, preserved only through blind faith and repetitive, or only continued as mere convention, *paramparā* is known by another name; it is called *rūḍhi*. True, *paramparā* also seeks continuance, as all meaningful human activity must, but what it seeks to preserve and continue is the essence and spirit of an activity, not every detail of its content. Criticism is an essential part of *paramparā*, in the light of which it can be changed and transformed. *Paramparā* is even willing to ask deeper questions such as, what is the essence and spirit of an activity, implying, in principle, the acceptance of far-reaching modifications and transformations.

Really foundational thinking in India regarding the nature of a *paramparā* in the arts was carried out in the field of literature and theatre, though it has a universality which makes it relevant to music or any other creative conscious human activity — a relevance which did not go unrecognised. Thinking in literature influenced thinking in general. Some of India's most profound literary theorists and critics have reflected on the requisites of a *paramparā* and their analysis is worth a look. There seems nothing quite as articulate in the west.

A *paramparā*, according to these thinkers, consists of three elements:

1. The *kavi*, that is, the poet, the playwright, or in other words, the artist.
2. *Kavikarma*, what the poet or artist does and the produce of this activity, the poem or the work of art.
3. The *sahṛdaya*, the sensitive recipient, the critic.

These elements constantly interact; one, moulding, modifying and transforming the other. The artist works with the forms that he or she inherits, continuing or transforming it in the light of *vyutpatti* and *pratibhā*, two notions central to the Indian understanding of the manner in which the artist works upon the forms he receives. *Vyutpatti* means an understanding and grasp of inherited material and recreating it with the little amount of modification, any true preservation necessarily calls for. *Vyutpatti*, plainly, is the key to the preservation and continuity of

any tradition. *Pratibhā*, parallel to 'genius' and a similarly hallowed word, is understood as that faculty of the mind (*buddhi*) which introduces innovations, opening new vistas.¹ *Pratibhā* is not limited to the artist. The *sahṛdaya*, the sensitive critic can also have it, though of course, *vyutpatti* is as important for him, or perhaps even more so than it is to the artist. The *sahṛdaya's* *pratibhā* is, naturally, different from that of the *kavi*. The *sahṛdaya's* role is to comprehend, compare and evaluate. It is he, who among other things, evaluates whether a creation is a product of *vyutpatti* or of *pratibhā* and assigns it a place in the *paramparā*. The *kavi's* *pratibhā* is appropriately called the *kārayitri pratibhā*, the capacity to create something new. The *sahṛdaya's* *pratibhā* is the *bhāvayitri*, the reflective, the cogitative *pratibhā*.

The two *pratibhās* complement each other and, ideally, creative persons have them both. Together they form a single whole. 'The single truth of imagination expresses itself in the dual roles of the poet and the critic', said Abhinavagupta (10th-11th centuries), one of the most *pratibhāvāna* and influential critics India has produced. Uttuṅodaya, a later Kerala critic, commenting on these remarks from Abhinava, who was from Kashmir, was in favour of granting a greater role to the critic than the poet: it is the judgement of a critic, he says, which, in the first place, makes the distinction between what is a poem and what is not.² Given this ideal one would expect a large body of critical literature. This one does find. Its tenor is not the same as what we know as literary criticism from the west. It is more

¹ *Navanavonmeṣāṣālini buddhiḥ pratibhā*, is an almost universally accepted 'definition' of *pratibhā*. The word 'unmeṣa' in this pithy definition literally means, 'the opening of the eyes', suggesting new horizons.

² The words we have quoted from Abhinava are from the verse with which he opens his renowned commentary, the *Locana* on the *Dhvanyāloka*: *kramātprakhyaopākhyāpra-sarasubhagaḥ bhāsayati tatī sarasvatyāstattvaṃ kavīsahṛdayākhyāḥ vijayate!* Uttuṅodaya, in his *Kaumudī* on the *Locana*, comments: 'sahṛdayakartṛkaviśiṣṭavicāra-kriyāgocaribhūtasyaiva kāvyasya mukhyatayā kāvyarūpatvāditi brūmaḥ. See *Dhvanyāloka* with *Locana* and *Kaumudī*, Kuppūsawami Sastri, Ramacandra Diksitar and T.R. Chintamani (eds.); Kuppūsawami Sastri Research Institute, Madras, 1944, pp. 3-4.

theoretical and philosophical. It does not cognise what the west knows as the 'history of literature', a central concern of the critic in the west, though it is aware in its own way of its own *paramparā*. The processes by which a poet transforms the works of older poets to create something new is spoken of, but is not strung together into a history. Moreover, the historical context of an artist, his individual personality, has not been considered too important in India, though his individual *kavikarma* and his *pratibhā* has been.

What we know as criticism from the west consists largely in the impressionistic, imaginative reactions of an individual *sahṛdaya* to works of art seen in their context. Such criticism is not unknown in India and there have been some great exponents of it such as Kuntaka (11th century) and Mahimabhaṭṭa (also 11th century), but this was an exception rather than the rule. Generally, critics in India were interested in larger aesthetic questions and matters of theory. They spoke of their subject matter from a distance as it were. Their great discussions, continuing over centuries into our own times are stimulatingly rich and varied, but they only occasionally provide personal reactions to specific artists or their works. Yet they do give us a powerful vocabulary for criticism of a more individualistic tenor. There is, moreover, evidence to believe that such individual criticism was not only potentially present, but was practised to a greater extent than the more respectable mainstream, critical literature testifies to. The practise of it was oral. Its pronouncements, being considered more ephemeral, relevant to individual works of art rather than art in general, were not written down. Still, vestiges of this oral tradition consisting of pithy judgements by individual critics concerning individual poets and their merits were sometimes encapsulated into striking verses and are to be found in the numerous anthologies of Sanskrit poetry compiled between the 12th and the 20th centuries.

Theoretical literature on music, too, has a long history going back to Vedic times. Moreover, there is no break here between the 'modern' and the 'traditional' as in most contemporary

thinking concerning literature and the other arts. However, the principal focus of the literature on music has been musical structure. Aesthetics was a comparatively minor consideration. It never acquired the vigour and depth that it did in literature. Keeping largely aloof from the philosophical mainstream of Indian thought, it never raised probing questions that could have given it the intellectual spine which literary aesthetics had. But this is not to deny its strength and presence. Musical texts speak of desirable and undesirable musical qualities (*guṇas* and *doṣas*), much in the manner of early literary critics. They also speak of styles though not very discursively; greater detail, however, is found in their delineation of kinds of musicians and what makes one more creative and greater than the other. They also speak of the importance of critics and the knowledge a good critic should possess. Besides, they speak of a host of things that can be identified as part of the complex scheme of ideas which we call the aesthetic aspect of a musical culture, even though they do not make musical aesthetics a major theoretical concern of their discourse. Criticism of actual music, of individual musicians, is even more rare in musical texts than is the criticism of poems and poets in the works on literary criticism. In search for examples, we must look to non-musical writings, where, needless to say, their occurrence is quite incidental. These provide us, however, with glimpses of an activity, which like literary criticism of a similar kind, remained largely oral. We might quote here an interesting example from a famous play, the *Mṛcchakaṭikam* of Śūdraka (between 2nd and 5th centuries). Cārudatta, the cultured protagonist, praises the singing of a friend, a professional musician, in the following words, after listening to him for a whole night till the early hours of the morning:

'He is not singing any more, but I can still hear his music. His soft voice, clinging harmoniously to the accompanying strings, while it moved over a succession of notes, still rings in my ears. His control was effortless, his music delicate, with phrases repeated out of passionate intensity. When the

movement of the melody, called for a high note, the effect was still gentle.'³ This interesting example is quite general in its judgement — one notes its relevance to certain contemporary styles of singing, too — but it is, perhaps, deliberately so. It is an example from a work where speaking in greater descriptive or critical detail about a work of art would itself have been an aesthetic fault, distracting the audience from the play itself. But criticism as practised within musical circles of the kind assumed in the play must have been much more richer in detail. Yet, however thin it might be, it does give us a glimpse of the kind of music criticism practised in urbane circles during the Gupta age. After the 12th-13th century, musical culture came to harbour certain ideas which looked at music not so much as an art but as a species of magic. The roots of the ideas were perhaps old, but their preponderance was new. They found entrance into formal musical texts. This was a development which has no parallel in literature as an art.

One of these new ideas was the association of a *rāga* with a time of the day or night or with a season. The idea began with the notion that certain musical forms were more *auspicious* when performed at a certain period of the daily or yearly cycle. Later, around the 16th century, the association was raised to an aesthetic principle: it was believed that a *rāga* was more beautiful, more effective as a piece of music, only in association with a certain time. The belief became part of musical practice, the repertoire of *rāgas* was more and more strictly distributed over the major periods of the day and night. In more recent times, this principle was gradually given up in the south. But in the north, it found a strong 'modern' champion. Pandit Bhatkhande, a major influence in contemporary Hindustani music, defended the practice on the basis of what he thought was

³ *tam tasya svarasaṅkramam mṛdugirah sliṣṭam ca tantrisvanam varṇānāmapi mūrchanāntaragatam tāram virāme mṛdum/ helāsāmyamitam punaśca lalitām rāga-dvitrucāritam yatsatyam virate'pi gītasamaye gacchāmi śṛṅvannivall Mṛcchakaṭikam, Act 3, verse 5; p. 70 of the Nirṇayasāgara press edition, third printing, Bombay, 1909.*

a 'scientific' ground. He argued that there was a psychophysical connection between the tonal structure of a *rāga* and specific periods of the day and night. He never really demonstrated this connection, but his assertion gave life to a curious practice which might otherwise have died a natural death as it did in the south.

Another, a more magically oriented idea was the notion of the miraculous effect of a *rāga* when correctly sung by a master — indeed, the proof of his being a master lay in the miracle he could create. *Rāga malhār*, it was believed, could cause rain, *rāga dipak* could cause fire, *rāga śrī* could bring a dead tree to life and *gūjari* could attract deer from the far-off forests. And great musicians could demonstrate this. True, not all *rāgas* were to be judged by such effects, nor did the idea find room in the texts on music, except marginally. Yet, it had a great hold over musical culture. It still continues to haunt us, though in a milder, more rationalised manner. I remember friends remarking that when they heard Allaudin Khan play *malhār* on his *sarod*, they could hear the sounds of rain falling outside the hall; if they closed their eyes.

The miraculous legends of *gūjari* attracting deer is perhaps connected with another idea which took deep roots in the musical culture after the 12th century. This was the idea of *rāga-dhyāna*, resulting in thousands of *rāga* paintings, very popular among painters and their patrons till the 19th century and still much admired. One recurring motif in these paintings is the association of *rāga gūjari* with deers: the *rāga* is shown as a beautiful woman playing a *vinā* in a forest, with deer flocking around her.

The notion of the *rāga-dhyāna* seems to have come into vogue around the 13th century. It began with conceiving and painting a *rāga* as a deity, a kind of minor god or goddess. Later, in the 16th century, the gods and goddesses were mostly secularised and transformed into men and women. They were painted in more dramatic and attractively human contexts and *rāga*-paintings became a very popular genre. *Rāgas* as deities could never become quite as popular. We must add, however,

that the idea of a *rāga* as a man or a woman in a dramatic situation was taken more seriously by painters and their patrons rather than musicians and their audience, despite the fact that music theorists were quite taken with the idea and almost every text written between the 14th and the 19th centuries, includes a section on *rāga-dhyāna*; besides, there were numerous little treatises called *Rāga-mālas* in Sanskrit and the vernacular devoted exclusively to *rāga-dhyānas*.

There is nothing particularly odd in such ideas having found vogue in musical circles. In trying to react to a formal, abstract art, such as music, we seem naturally to seek a more tangible and corporeal basis for our judgements. This is what the *rāga*-time notions do or what the *rāga-dhyāna* ideas seek. They try to assimilate music to something we can see. Giving miraculous powers to *rāgas*, makes them even more 'visible' in their effects, if not in themselves. Earlier critical vocabulary, though it was not assimilated to ambitious aesthetic theories regarding the musical art, such as the critical vocabulary in literature was, by and large avoided giving it a representative nature, a content as well as a form, if we take Carudatta's criticism of his musician friend as a typical example. Yet earlier musical aesthetics, too, was not able to avoid the enticement of the *rasa* theory, which had almost become the universal aesthetic theory in India. A fertile notion, propounded for understanding the aesthetics of theatre, it was taken over by literary theorists and such was their influence on aesthetic thinking in general, that it became synonymous with the experience of any art. The notion had become a dominant cultural ideal, rather than just an idea, and writers on music, too, adopted it. But they did so quite unthinkingly, without *adapting* it to the special needs of music where a distinction cannot be made between form and content as it can be in theatre and literature.

Music, for the last few centuries in India, has had no lack of *kārayitri pratibhā*, but the *bhāvayitri pratibhā* of the *sahṛdayas* has lagged behind, even more so in matters of aesthetics than in musical theory. The art was willing to change, experiment and

grow, without losing the spirit of its *paramparā*, musical theory was incapable of keeping pace: more so, it appears, in the north than in the south; for these were the centuries when the *paramparā* bifurcated into Hindustani and Karnatic.

In the north, the situation in musical theory is now much livelier. Ever since Pandit Bhatkhande, whose career spanned the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there has been a growing interest in musical theory and musical textual history. Bhatkhande was also, to a great extent, responsible in introducing a more modern, institutionalised, tradition of transmission and patronage in music, without losing the strength of the old and a continuity with it, such as has *not* happened in the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture.

But an analogous renewal in music criticism and aesthetics has yet to take place. It had potentialities and still has them. The *oral* tradition of music criticism as carried on among artists and sensitive listeners has a rich vocabulary based on tradition though it lacks a systematics. The systematics can come only if the oral becomes written. This is not to say that there is no written tradition of criticism. Newspapers have necessitated one. But it has all the weakness of something nurtured purely by journalism. It has no touch with the oral vocabulary of the tradition, though there are some critics who are beginning to dabble in one. Using English, and a modern vocabulary, it is like a lost soul unable to find itself, though growing in power. The written tradition which is now, acknowledgedly, a must, can only acquire strength and spine from an intellectual effort that must not be limited to newspaper writings and becomes rooted in more serious reflection, not limited to effervescent musings, to be forgotten the next day. For this, it must look to the rich aesthetic thought of the past, albeit with a critical eye, for Indian aesthetics is not always *directly* concerned with music though it bears seeds of possibilities. It must also learn from the western experience. Though greater caution must be exercised here. For Indian music is not western music.

What a modern music critic in India can learn from the west

is an approach, forging a history of the art. History of art, indeed history itself, is a new way of looking at things in India. Many of the other arts, especially literature, have good histories now. But not music. Old music does not survive unchanged, so central is the role of improvisation and individual genius in India. The little notation that does survive, gives only a skeletal idea of the music and still has problems of decoding. But while a larger history of music in concrete terms is elusive at present — though interesting attempts are being made at a reconstruction — yet a history of arts approach to the music of our own century is possible. A great deal is present in recordings as well as notations. An in-depth study in palpable formal terms of various musicians, their individual style and development, the currents and cross-currents influencing the art, its changes and its continuities, is possible today. And it would be extremely interesting for both the artist and the listener and the critic to become aware of this. But the needed intellectual effort to make such studies still remains largely a mere possibility, though one feels that the musical community as a whole will welcome it and feel enriched by it.

CHAPTER – TWO

Transformation as Creation

(A notion of imagination as Creative Transformation envisaged by certain ancient Indian literary critics and its application in the field of music.)

The idea of creative imagination naturally suggests artistic activity. Activity such as that of the writer, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the dancer, the architect and the like. This, we generally think, is the homeground of creative imagination, though as has been justly pointed out, every human endeavour, whether of thought or action, presupposes it, or, at least, needs it in order to be significant. The writer comes first on my list because we who deal in words tend to think of literature before any other art. But I have another, a more important reason for listing him first. Reflections over the writer's art, that is, literature, has a longer history and a greater depth of critical self-awareness in India than thinking about any other art, a fact which is perhaps true of most cultures.

Indian literary criticism, however, gives great attention to form and this makes some of its concepts and formulations relevant not only to literature, where the content is as important as the form, but also to the more "formal" arts such as music, dance and architecture. In talking about the relation of art to society, we need to discuss these arts, too, and relate the creative activity in them to the changing social milieu to the extent that this is feasible. As I am more familiar with music, most of my comments in this direction will relate to music and particularly Hindustani music and its history. What I have to say is rather exploratory and I hope it will be imaginative enough to save it from being merely fanciful.

The first part of my paper will be devoted to presenting in outline a concept of literary creativity as conceived by

Ānandavardhana and treated in detail by Rājāśekhara, in which the idea of transformation plays a key role. The new, according to these ancient Indian critics, is born through imaginatively restructuring the old. This, one may point out, has always been true of all arts everywhere. Artists, be they poets, painters, sculptors, architects, or musicians, work within a tradition. They are heirs to a body of forms, that is, of "given" creations, which guide and shape their own endeavours. Transformation, in other words, is manifestly an inherent process in any artistic creation. Artists learn by copying and create by transmuting. This is even more obvious in cultures, where tradition is not a bad word and a new work is deliberately modelled on the old.

The importance of Ānandavardhana and, following him, Rājāśekhara lies in the fact that they have conceptually articulated the role and significance of the transformatory function in artistic creativity. These Indian critics, so far as I know, are the only ones who have consciously *theorised* about this function, even though its *use* has been common enough in all arts everywhere. They distinguish between kinds and modes of transformation, and Rājāśekhara categorizes them in detail, analysing the various processes involved at some length. They also distinguish between creative and non-creative transformations. Their discussion is worth recording in itself, but for me what they have done in the field of poetry will serve as a prelude for a similar attempt in analysing the creative process in music, a formal, non-representational art where creation more obviously involves transforming the given.

Alamkāraśāstra, the name given in India to the literature of critical thinking concerning *kāvya* — the general term for imaginative writing — produced some of its most penetrating works over a period of two to three centuries between the 9th and the 12th, mostly in Kashmir. A few of the questions which occupied the critics were: What is *kāvya*? How is it distinct from other writings? What is its purpose? What is *rasa*? How is *rasa* aroused? In whom? These were hotly debated issues and many insightful ideas and theories came up as a result of prolonged discussions

lasting over numerous generations. Related to these were the questions regarding the nature of creative imagination and how it operates.

Interesting in our context, I believe, is the answer given by Anandavardhana to the last question as to how creative imagination operates. Anandavardhana discusses it in the last section of his remarkable work, the *Dhvanyālokā*, written sometime towards the end of the 9th century. It became one of the most influential critical works in India concerning *kāvya*. A century after its composition, the celebrated Abhinava Gupta wrote an equally influential commentary on it which he named the *Dhvanyālokalocana*, renderable, perhaps, as "The eye-opener to the *Dhvanyāloka*."

The critical thinking of the period we are speaking of, was pursued in an ambience of general philosophical theories and debates. This, I think, lends it a lasting depth and universality, even though this character has also been responsible for disparaging comments by historians oriented towards the impressionistic criticism of the 19th-century West. To them, Indian critical thinking was too general, too distant from the phenomenon it dealt with. Moreover, in this view, even where it came close to what it dealt with, it was much too formalistic. But it is just this formal character which makes it significant for me here.

Before getting on to what interests me in the *Dhvanyāloka*, let me briefly introduce it in the perspective of Indian poetics. The idea of *rasa*, one of the central, or perhaps the central, concept in Indian aesthetic thinking was initially outlined by Bharata, the semi-mythical author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a work on theatre belonging in its present form to the beginning of the Christian era. Translating the term *rasa* is a tricky problem, as has been pointed out countless times. It is not only difficult to think of a simple, single equivalent word or phrase, such as, "dominant mood", "feeling", "basic emotions", "sentiments", "ethos" or the like, but futile to think of any. Anything but a long discursive explanation can only oversimplify, and thus distort, a complex concept which, as it stands, is definitive of the aesthetic realm in general as well as of emotions savoured through the

experience of *kāvya*, emotion thus rendered as being in some sense "trans" or "extra" normal. My intention, in this paper, is not to discuss *rasa*, except indirectly. I will assume in my readers a familiarity with the concept.

Bharata, writing on theatre, had outlined the notion of *rasa* in connection with drama. More complex issues concerning the nature of *rasa*, the number of *rasas*, how distinguished, how aroused, how emotion in the *rasa*-state differs from ordinary experience and the like, were taken up much later mostly by the Kashmiri theorists of the period we have spoken of. It was argued that *kāvya* in general, of which drama, termed *drśya kāvya*, was but a species, gave rise to *rasa* in ways analogous to drama. Semantic issues were also involved in discussing *kāvya*, for *kāvya* uses words as its medium. The moot problem here posed before the *ālankārikas* was: what distinguished the use of this medium in *kāvya* since words are also used in scientific, injunctive and other writings. It is in this area that Anandavardhana's chief contribution lies. The semantic theories he had inherited argued for what may be called a pragmatic, common-sensical or "literal" concept of meaning. Anandavardhana contended that words have meaning in many expressive, emotive ways not envisaged in this semantic scheme which took only the denotative sense into account.¹ Words, he said, do not only depict, they also evoke. Their power cannot really be understood within any semantic

¹ Before Anandavardhana, Indian semantics, or what may be called its main strand, postulated a *śakti*, "a power" in words termed *abhidhā* through which they directly denoted their objects. *Abhidhā*, it was believed, was aided by another "power" termed *lakṣaṇā* which came into play when *abhidhā* landed into obvious absurdities. As in common usages like, "I drank five glasses", "He passed through hell", "John is a rat". The function of *lakṣaṇā* in such cases was to restore the denotative *abhidhā* sense through simple "logical" connections or associations. Thus "glasses" = "What they contain", "hell" = "suffering" and "rat" = "unpleasant habits or properties of a rat". Here the function of *lakṣaṇā* ended. It merely came to the rescue of *abhidhā* when usage showed such waywardness. It did no more. One can see, however, that "hell" and "rat" in these sentences cannot be reduced to any simple denotative meaning. They have a suggestive aura which cannot be tied down to *abhidhā* and this is one reason which led Anandavardhana to argue for *dhvani*, an evocative "power" in words, beyond *abhidhā* and *lakṣaṇā*.

scheme which takes only logical relations into account. They have a large nimbus or aura of multiple meanings which they express through psychological, rather than logical, relations. He called this aura of meaning or "meaningfulness" — if one may use this word — *dhvani*, which I think can be best translated as "echo". Abhinava, in explaining it, speaks of *anuranana* or "resonance".² The *kāvya*-ness of *kāvya* lies in its powerful use of the potency of *dhvani* in words. It is, Ānandavardhana further argued, through the transliteral, often multivalent and multi-splendoured echo of meanings in words that *kāvya* generates the experience of *rasa*.

Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, which literally means "light on *dhvani*", is divided into four chapters called *udyotas*, literally, "illuminators". He believed that in *dhvani* he had discovered a new, revolutionary principle, which could illuminatingly transform all previous theorising concerning *kāvya*. In the first three *udyotas* of his work Ānandavardhana occupies himself in demonstrating that linguistic usage cannot be fully comprehended without accepting *dhvani*. He explores the various modes and ways of its operation showing how all that is fruitful in previous theorising can be more meaningfully subsumed under its workings.

In the fourth *udyota* Ānandavardhana speaks of how an awareness of the working of *dhvani* can give us — meaning the poet and his audience, *kavi* and *sahṛdaya* — an insight into the process of creation. The *udyota* begins with the proclamation that imagination is capable of infinite novelty (*pratibhānantyam*). Interestingly, however, the capability of creating something new is defined as the capacity to renew, that is, to give an "old" established theme, motif, image or expression a new freshness by restating it with a richer nuance. The creative use of *dhvani*, says Ānandavardhana, can impart newness to a poetic statement though it be a restatement of older, "given" material (*vānī purātanakavinibaddhārthasamsparsavatyapi navatvamāyāti*). He gives a few instances to illustrate his

² Abhinava on *Dhvanyāloka*, *udyota* I, *kārikā*, 13: see p. 241, vol. 1 of Dr. Ramasagara Tripathi's edition of *Dhvanyāloka* (Motilal Banaridass, 1973).

contention. The illustrations show how an established *mazmūn*, to give a familiar term from Urdu-Persian literature, signifying poetic theme or substance, becomes enriched in the hands of a greater poet who can wield his words with a greater suggestive power. An old poem in the hands of a creative poet is transformed into a new work.

It would be helpful here to take an example given by Ānandavardhana himself. Quoting a well-known verse from Amaru, he places against it a newer poem on the same theme or *mazmūn*. The freshness or the originality of the new poem, he says, cannot be denied, despite the force of the original.

Amaru's poem is:

*Śūnyam vāagrham vilokya sayanādutthāya kiñcicchanaih
nidrāvyañjamupāgatasya suciram nirvarṇya patyurmukham/
visrabdham paricumbya jātapulakāmālokya gaṇḍasthalim
lajjanamramukhi priyena hasatā bālā ciram cūmbitāll*

[Certain that they were alone in the room, the young bride slowly raised herself a little on the bed. She gazed long at her husband's face as he lay feigning sleep. Thinking that he was really asleep, she planted a kiss on his cheek. No sooner than she did this, she saw the soft hair on his face bristle with pleasure. Overcome with shyness, she at once hid her face. Laughingly, her lover hugged her and gave her a long kiss.]

It is a masterly poem in the original Sanskrit, chiselled in its artistry, painting a dramatic, evocative scene. None would easily dare to tinker with it. Yet a later poet modelled his own poem on it and produced perhaps a greater masterpiece. What he did was to rearrange the same scene, infusing it with a greater depth and inwardness. The author of the newer poem is unknown. Perhaps Ānandavardhana knew the name but does not mention it.

I would like to put in a remark here by way of parenthesis before quoting the newer poem. The notion of *rasa*, I have said, was conceived by Bharata in the context of theatre. The dramatic manner of depicting *rasa* tended to become normative and a marked dramatic element is present in much Sanskrit poetry.

Amaru's poem pictures a scene not unlike a dramatic tableau which, though not entirely frozen or static, has a situational quality easily seen as an intense moment of heightened drama. My translation aims at outlining the dramatic scene described, the rich poetic nuances are, of course, lost.

The newer poem in Sanskrit reads:

*nidrākaitavinah priyasya vadanairvinyasya vaktram vadhūh
bodhābhāsaniruddhacumbanarasāpyābhogalolaṃ sthītā
vailakṣyād vimukhibhavediti punastasyāpyanārambhīṇah
sākāṅkṣapratipatti nāma hrdayaṃ yātaṃ tu pāraṃ rateh!*

[As her husband lay feigning sleep, the young bride placed her cheek softly against his, forcibly restraining herself from the bliss (*rasa*) of kissing him passionately. And yet she throbbed with joy (*ābhoga*). He, too, remained unmoving lest she move away, embarrassed. Thus holding themselves back from what they intensely desired to do, their hearts were yet transported beyond the summit of eros.]

The playful movement of the earlier scene here becomes totally still, the outer movement transfigured into a vibration within. The action is so internalised, it transcends the realm of drama, becoming pure poetry: it can no longer be rendered on the stage. The poet certainly succeeds in handling his model imaginatively, metamorphosing his given material into something new and original. Such transformation, in Ānandavardhana's view, was nothing short of creation.³

³ Significantly, this verse, unlike the earlier one, uses purely verbal, "poetic" devices to great effect. It has two instances of the figure called contradiction or paradox: (1) the girl is described as *niruddhacumbanarasā*, "deprived of the bliss of kissing" and yet *ābhogalolaṃ sthītā*, "vibrating with joy" *rasa* and *ābhoga* acting as synonyms here. (2) The other instance, occurring in the last line is obvious enough. Its effect is heightened by a subtle *double entendre* on the phrase *sākāṅkṣapratipatti* which means literally "unfulfilled desire" but also, as a technical term in grammar, "an incompletely formulated sentence", which "wants" something before it can make sense: a sentence left hanging in the middle of sense and nonsense as it were. An utterance such as, "Fortunately I... ", for example, which demands additional phrases such as, "was there" or "had money", or "could hang on to the cliff" or the like, to make sense.

He cites, in this connection, an interesting opinion held by some critics who denied the very possibility of original creation in poetry. These critics argued that the purpose of poetry was to express universals of experience (*anubhāvvyānubhavasā-mānyam*). Such universals were finite in number and common to all men at all times, past or present. And, as such, they had already been expressed by earlier poets leaving nothing for modern poets to say. If, nevertheless, a new poet felt that he was making an original utterance, this was just make-belief, a subjective opinion (*mānamātram*). Ānandavardhana rejoins that if this view were true we would have had no original poetry after Vālmiki's *Rāmāyana*, the epic considered the *ādikāvya*, the primal poem in Sanskrit literature. For one would be inclined to assert that Vālmiki, the archetypal, paradigmatic poet, had already expressed the universals of experience. But this is patently absurd. It goes against the overwhelming judgement of *sahṛdayas*, discerning lovers of poetry, who recognise great poetry and poets after Vālmiki.

The *pūrvapakṣa*, the view which denies the possibility of new creation, argues, in reply, that all that is new in a so-called new poem is the use of new expressions for the same old things. In answer, Ānandavardhana asserts that a new word inevitably implies a new meaning, a new content (*vācya*), because words are inextricably (*avinābhāvena*) linked with their meaning or content. New expressions cannot but imply a new content.

Ānandavardhana admits that resemblances — *saṃvādāh*, 'conformances' he calls them — do exist between the creations of poets, between the old and the new. Some may be involuntary since, as he says, minds of men work in similar ways.

However, this is not to deny the possibility of entirely original poetic creation. Just as nature, he remarks, can always create a new object⁴ in spite of the endless variety of what it already has, so can a poet. But having said this he exhorts poets not to be afraid of *saṃvādas*, not to desist from a deliberate model-oriented practice

⁴ *Dhvanyāloka*, *udyoṭa* 4, *vṛtti* on *kārikā* 10.

and reliance on handling existing material. For this can be done creatively, resulting in new, "original" poems.

Samvādas between poems can be, according to him, of three kinds: 1. *Pratibimbavat*, that between a man and his mirror image; 2. *ālekhyavat*, that between a man and his representation in painting: a painting necessarily transforms what it paints. (The kind of painting which Ānandavardhana and his contemporaries would have known, such as that of Ajanta, transforms quite palpably); 3. *tulyadehivat*, that between two men similar in looks but with distinct identities of their own.

Only the third kind of *samvāda* is really creative: a poem reconstituted with the same elements as those of its model, but infused with a new self or spirit. Ānandavardhana does not go into the details of how the three types of *samvādas* he speaks of are to be distinguished in actual poetic practice. He leaves this to the judgement of his reader, assuming that one who had studied the rest of his work would be able to arrive at the details on his own. The example we have quoted from him earlier is certainly, in his view, an instance of creative transformation, that is the *tulyadehivat*.

Inspired perhaps by Ānandavardhana, another theorist, Rājaśekhara, whose career followed soon after that of Ānandavardhana, used a similar scheme for analysing poetic creativity.⁵ His work, or what survives of it, the *Kāvyaṃimānsā* is a manual for poets, intended as advice concerning how best to develop their art. It is in the context of plagiarism, *parārathaharaṇa*, that Rājaśekhara discusses ways of handling older material. He goes into much greater detail in discussing the matter than Ānandavardhana. For, unlike his predecessor, he was talking to poets about the techniques of their craft —

⁵ Rājaśekhara quotes Ānandavardhana at the beginning of the 5th chapter of his *Kāvyaṃimānsā*. Also in a stray verse attributed to him, he praises Ānandavardhana's concept of *dhvani*: See *op. cit.*, G.O.S. ed., edited by Dalal and Shastri, Baroda, 1934, p. 156. It is not unlikely that Rājaśekhara was not directly inspired by Ānandavardhana in this matter, but that both were drawing from a common tradition current among critics and poets.

kavikarma — not only delving into principles.

→ Rājaśekhara uses the phrase *parārathaharaṇa* to mean appropriating something written by another. Yet *haraṇa* if creatively done, he says, is not *haraṇa* but *svikaraṇa*, "assimilation", a legitimate, indeed, commendable poetic practice. *Svikaraṇa* operates through creatively transforming given material.

Rājaśekhara classifies various ways of handling older material on the basis of what he calls *yoni*: source. He has three basic categories of *yoni*: (1) *anyayoni*, a new poem of which the source is transparent, where one can easily make out the model on which it is based. (2) *nihnutayoni*, "concealed *yoni*", where the older poem is transformed beyond recognition into a new work. (3) *ayoni*, a poem without a source, an entirely original, non-model-oriented creation. Rājaśekhara further subdivides the first and the second of these categories into sub-classes. But the third, *ayoni*, has no subclass; it is not really a way of handling older material but a category in itself. It cannot be further classified, for how can one prefabricate categories for the entirely original?⁶

Rājaśekhara subdivides *anyayoni* into two broad classes: (1) *pratibimbakalpa* and (2) *ālekhyakalpa*. These parallel the first two classes in Ānandavardhana (the suffix *kalpa* here is synonymous with *vat* of the earlier classification). Rājaśekhara describes the *pratibimbakalpa* — what may be called the mirror-image class — as no more than rewording an older poem in newer terms, thus making a change which does not alter the *paramārtha*, the "essential meaning" of the given.⁷ This is an uncreative category, as in Ānandavardhana. But unlike

⁶ Rājaśekhara does speak of three very broad "kinds" of *ayoni* poems, making a distinction on the basis of subject-matter: *laukika*, "this-worldly" concerned with things of this world; *alaukika* "trans-worldly" concerned with the gods and *miśra*, "mixed", concerned with a combination of the two: *Kāvyaṃimānsā*, chapter 12. But this classification is radically different from the others in principles; its basis is not how the new transforms the old. Any corpus whatsoever of poems can, in fact be classified as *laukika*, *alaukika* and *miśra*.

⁷ *Kāvyaṃimānsā*, Chapter 12.

Ānandavardhana, Rājāśekhara grants some creativity to the next class, namely the *ālekhyaprakhyā* (*prakhyā* in also synonymous with *vat*) — he was after all writing for the poet who is also a craftsman and could not keep his standards too stringent. He defines *ālekhyaprakhyā* as: “making a given theme or subject matter seem different through somewhat touching it up, refining it, making it more elegant (*saṃskārakarma*).”⁸ The example he gives is illuminating. He quotes an old verse which describes the black snakes twined around Śiva’s neck, with their hoods raised, as sprouts emerging from the dark, world-destroying poison stored in Śiva’s throat — the poison having sprouted due to the life-giving waters of the close-by Gaṅgā dripping on them. This verse became the model for another which makes a minor variation in the metaphor. The new verse describes the white snakes twined around Siva’s locks as sprouts emerging from the root-like half-moon which the god wears in his matted locks, watered by the nearby Gaṅgā. The language of the second verse closely follows the first and is obviously modelled on it. We have here a clear case of a variation on a theme, though admittedly a minor one.⁹

The two categories which Rājāśekhara considers really creative are the *tulyadehitulyā* and the *parapurapraveśatulyā* (*tulyā* is an other synonym of *vat*) — he commends them with the words: *so yaṃ ullekhaṇānanugrāhyo mārgaḥ*: “This is a recommended path worthy of its name”; though in recommending *ālekhyā*, he does not use the extra adjective, “worthy of its name”.

Ānandavardhana had spoken of *tulyadehivat* as an apparent outward similarity but a marked inner difference between two poems. Rājāśekhara inverts the definition: he defines *tulyadehitulyā* as a poem apparently differing from its model in content yet having a clearly-felt inner resemblance.¹⁰ He gives two examples, each differently expressing a theme, common in Sanskrit poetry: “an extraordinary object needs an extraordinary

⁸ Ibid., Chapter 12.

⁹ Ibid., Chapter 12.

¹⁰ Rājāśekhara, *op. cit.*, Chapter 12.

home.” The first poem expresses the idea thus: horses are common objects and can live in any home, but only a king’s palace is a proper home for an elephant, or else it should be left in the forest. The second, a purportedly derivative poem, expresses the same idea through a change of metaphor: a diamond, it says, deserves a royal home or it had better not be taken out of the mine where it belongs.

Rājāśekhara’s examples are not as inspired as those of Ānandavardhana or Kuntaka, to mention another theorist. They are not convincing as good examples of creative writing. But we are not here concerned with Rājāśekhara’s critical judgement of poetry, but rather with his analytical categories which remain formally valuable, whatever the aesthetic value of the illustrations he gives to demonstrate them.

The *parapurapraveśa*, the other broad sub-class under *nihnutayoni*, is not found in Ānandavardhana. The word literally means: “A person who has entered an alien town”. He would look different, transformed by the new surroundings. Rājāśekhara defines this suggestive term more discursively as: “keeping the root idea or motif of the model but changing its context,” its “entourage”, he calls it, using another evocative word.¹¹

Each of the four categories recorded above has eight sub-classes. It is interesting to see how Rājāśekhara makes his subdivisions, illustrating each with a verse. He has a very formal approach; he gives us quite a structural analysis of the ways and techniques by which a given poem may be transposed or transmuted. He sounds startlingly like a musician recounting the different ways in which given musical pieces or themes may be varied. Each variation bears a name, some are colourfully figurative, and given, it would appear, by practising poets.

I would like to list here some of these variations — without quoting the examples Rājāśekhara cites as illustrations — mainly to project more vividly his formal approach, suggestive of the practice of musicians.

¹¹ Rājāśekhara, *op. cit.*, Chapter 12.

I will begin by listing a few of the eight sub-species he classifies under *pratibimbakalpa*, which in his view was a transformation not deserving to be called “creative”. I will mainly list those which rely on structural change. The very first is termed *vyatyastaka* — a name which may be rendered as “scattering the sequence”. It is defined as “changing the order of parts without affecting the whole.” The second is *khaṇḍa* — meaning “a segment”. This consisted of using part of a larger theme turning it into a complete poem. The third is *tailabindu* — literally “a drop of oil” — defined as enlarging or rather spreading out a brief idea in a manner resembling the spread of a drop of oil on water: considered an ugly shapeless spread. Another is *naṭanepathya* — “an actor’s costume” — a transformation which merely translates a poem into another language, like an actor changing his dress. In music this could mean changing the words of a tune without making a change in the music.¹² These, I think, are enough to indicate what Rājaśekhara is trying to do. He adds that making variations of the above kind only stamps a poet as a non-poet, revealing a lack of creativity (*kaverakavitvadāyī*).

Ālekhyaprakhyā, which Rājaśekhara allows to be a creative mode of transformation, also has eight sub-species. Many of these, significantly, are structurally similar to those of the earlier non-creative mode. *Vyutkrama*, defined as the reversal of a given manner of stating a theme (*krameṇābhīhitasyārthasya viparītābhīdhānam*), is really no different from *vyatyastaka*, where the change consisted of a rearrangement of parts.

Another variation, *navanepathya* — “new costume” — is the same as *naṭanepathya*, — “an actor changing his costume” — of the earlier category. Similarly, *uttamaṣa*, — “an earring” — defined as “giving importance to a subsidiary idea” can be

¹² Śārṅgadeva, the author of the famous 13th-century epitome on music, *Sāṅgitarātnākara*, categorizes *vāggeyakāras* (composers), into three classes. The best are those who compose both the music and the words in a song. The lesser ones are those who borrow another’s music, merely composing new words for it.

equated with the earlier, *khaṇḍa* — “a segment” — that is, that using part of given theme.¹³

The difference is the addition of a new dimension, namely, creativity, which cannot be totally reduced to structure. What was just a transformation becomes here a creative transformation. Rājaśekhara quotes a verse from an earlier critic to express this idea. The entire range of available matter, says this critic, is given to the poet for transformation, which can be effected as an actor uses colour to transform himself through make-up.¹⁴ The simile of the actor has been used again, but notable is the phrase used for expressing the idea of the kind of change effected, *anyathātvamivārcchati*: “achieves a distinctive identity”. Creative handling makes it a *felt* qualitative change, though the structural process remains the same.

There are some interesting sub-divisions of the remaining two categories, the *tulyadehitulya* and *parapurapraveśasadrśa* which could be listed and discussed here. But I think we have had enough of Rājaśekhara. What I have in mind is not to discuss him but draw from him some cues in understanding creativity in music.

I need not stress, to begin with, the key role of improvisation in Indian music, or in other words, the basic transformational approach towards the given material. In poetry, at least sophisticated *kāvya* poetry, the same verse is, ideally speaking, handed over exactly as it was composed. If distortions have taken place, the reason is that the transmission process has not been quite as ideal as one could wish. Two different copies of the same poem are — or should be — identical. A Kālidāsa cannot be changed, though a *new* poem may take him as a model. In Indian music there are few genres where such an ideal is even sought for. In Ravindra Saṅgīta or in film songs one does seek to make different renderings replicas of the original. But these are recent, non-“Traditional”, genres.

¹³ For sub-species of the *ālekhyaprakhyā*, see chapter 13 of the *Kāvyaṇimānsā*.

¹⁴ *Ibid. loc. cit.*

The attempt at exact replication is a recent ideal in music, introduced from the west, where transformation is the prerogative of the composer. He alone may transform given material to create something new, as in the Sanskrit tradition of art-poetry. But once a composition is given final shape it has to be rendered, ideally at least, exactly as given. Some transformational role is allowed to the conductor who may "interpret" a work in his way. But this is, in many cases, because of ambiguities in the scores of given compositions.¹⁵ And even so, the transformation that does take place remains much below even the level of Rājaśekhara's first category, the *pratibimbakalpa*. The performance of a western symphony is an attempt to produce a mirror image of the original. Rājaśekhara's *pratibimbakalpa*, despite its name — "mirror-image" — is more than producing a replica, a copy, of a given work. It is, we have seen, a transformational category, however insignificant one may judge the *quality* of the transformation to be. It, grantedly, does not produce a *new* work. In Hindustani music, a transformation that may be fittingly termed *pratibimbakalpa*, is certain to creep in between all traditional musical genres whether light or classical, whether a *ghazal*, a *qawwali* or a *thumri*, a *khyāl* or a *dhrupad*. No two renderings of a piece in these forms, even by the same musician, are exact replicas. If we still speak of the "same" piece it is because we judge the transformation to be insignificant, or in other words, *pratibimbakalpa*. A transformation there is bound to be, its quality or degree depending on the genre; its total absence would be a rare thing,

¹⁵ In music, as in many other arts, a degree of what may be termed "interpretation" is involved in even faithfully copying a work. A copy in music can never be a mechanical copy in the sense that two copies of the same poem are. Such copies can only be produced on a gramophone or a similar device. A musician reproducing an original cannot do so mechanically. For reproduction itself is an art, a process which is bound to leave some imprint of the artist on the work he copies. He cannot but interpret, in other words, as he copies. But interpretation, in a significant sense, comes in only when the original is uncertain, not given in its entirety, and thus having parts or aspects capable of alternate renderings.

needing, indeed, an unusual, out-of-the-ordinary effort.

The reason is that musical education itself consists of training in the techniques and norms of improvisation. True, a musician is also taught certain more or less pre-set forms, but the handling of these has to be essentially improvisational. The more *sāstrīya*, "classical", the form, the greater, one might think, paradoxically, the role of improvisation in it. Thus, improvisation, is central to *thumri*, *tappā*, *khyāl* and *dhrupad*. Transformation in other words, is built into the very making of any particular performance in any of these forms.

In analysing and judging such music, transformational categories such as those of Rājaśekhara can plainly be of great help. When we speak of two performances or renderings of a *ghazal*, *thumri* or *khyāl* being the "same", the identity in such cases can be meaningfully understood only in terms of a *pratibimbakalpa* likeness. A later rendering is never exactly a replica of the earlier one. There is bound to be some rearrangement of parts. We speak of the two as being the same because we feel no real change has taken place — there is no *anyathā-bhāva*, to use an earlier phrase quoted from Rājaśekhara.

This raises a question. Can we delineate the structural details of what I have, following Rājaśekhara, called the *pratibimbakalpa* in music? His model, I should think, will not serve as more than an analogy: music does not use words in which form and content can be analytically sifted with convenient ease. Music is form alone, or at least, the content in it is inseparable from form. The distinction of word and meaning so essential in poetry is meaningless in music. Analytical categories applying to poetry, however structural, cannot be used for music without important modifications and alternations. Details will have to be worked out, though I must confess, I have as yet not made a move in that direction.

But if we have to work out any details at all we must first seek to answer two crucial questions: What is the "given" in music that the musician seeks to transform and how and with what does he do it?

In seeking to answer these questions, I shall be speaking of the "classical" forms alone, though what I have to say may be seen at the end of my analysis to apply also to the relatively lighter forms of Hindustani music. The answer to the first question is obviously: a *rāga*. In classical music what a musician is taught are *rāgas* which are his "given". But the "given" in this case is a peculiar "given". It is not a pre-formed structure which a musician has simply to reproduce. A *rāga* is a generalised form. Take the description of any *rāga* and what you will have is a general description of its form: rules and norms concerning the total path the *rāga* should traverse. Its *antaramārga*, as the ancients aptly called it: the scale (*thāt*) to be used, notes to be emphasized, weakened, dropped, jumped over, to be more significantly interlinked, to be used in ascending or descending, obligatory bends or twists to be made between them and so on. Given this, any *rāga* can in principle be realised or given concrete form in a number of different ways. But this is true only in principle. In practice certain crystallisations have taken place, crystallisations made by generations of creative musicians, to which a new practitioner becomes heir. These crystallisations are a musician's "given". They are not, however, fixed or frozen entities. They cannot be reproduced as replicas: though, of course, they have elements which are relatively more stable, such as the *bandish*.¹⁶ But a large part of their form remains fluid and malleable.

These crystallisations, I think, can best be described as styles. We have in Hindustani music four major styles of rendering a *rāga* (not to speak of sub-styles — *gharanās* — within these): the *dhrupad* style, the *khyāl* style, the *thumrī* style and the *tappā* style. I believe that in order to seek an answer to the second question I had asked earlier, namely, how and with what does a musician create and transform a *rāga* (for every creation itself involves transformation, using improvisation as it does), we must

¹⁶ A composition "fixed" in its melodic contours, set to a certain rhythmic cycle (*tāla*) and often forming the nexus around which improvisation takes place.

look for the structural basis of musical style.

But before I analyse further, I must deal with an objection that is bound to arise concerning what I have just said. I have spoken of four styles in which a *rāga* can be rendered, implying that any *rāga* can be rendered in any of these styles. The immediate objection would be that this is simply not true. *Thumrī* is sung in only a handful of *rāgas*; so is *tappā*. There are *rāgas* of more recent origin in which *dhrupad* is not sung,¹⁷ others such as *Khamāj* and *Bhairavī* in which *khyāl* is not sung. Yet *dhrupad* and *khyāl* are the two encompassing, inclusive styles in Hindustani music: most *rāgas* can be sung in both and almost all *rāgas* can be sung in either of them. We should, therefore, it may be argued, speak of only two styles of rendering *rāgas*. The other two are not truly universal styles, being limited to a few *rāgas*.

I would, in reply, like to argue two points. One: it is true that presently the *thumrī* and *tappā* styles are confined to a very few *rāgas* and are in this sense lame styles. But this is a relatively recent development. Earlier these styles were as broad-based as the *khyāl*. There existed *thumris* in all the *rāgas* in which *khyāls* were sung. Tradition bears this out. And if one needs documentary evidence, one has only to pick up the two collections of Lucknow *thumrī* published by the University Press of the Sangita Nataka Akademi, U.P., and look at the list of *rāgas* in which Lallan Piyā and other equally famous singers had composed *thumris*. One of these two collections is devoted entirely to Lallan Piyā, a singer who lived into the twentieth century.¹⁸

¹⁷ When I say "sung", I also imply "played", for the musical styles I am speaking of apply to the manner of rendering a *rāga* irrespective of whether this is done in singing or playing.

¹⁸ *Thumrī Saṅgraha* compiled and notated by Gangadhar Rao Telang, Lucknow, 1977. *Lallan Piyā Ki Thumriyām*, compiled and notated by Bharatendu Bajpai, Lucknow 1977. We gather from the introduction of the latter work that a direct disciple of Lallan Piyā died in 1950. It is not unlikely, therefore, that Lallan Piyā himself was alive at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This might at once prompt a question: why has *thumri* declined, and so speedily? I will not let this question distract me here and move on to my second point which, in fact, follows from the first. The fact that the *thumri*, could mould any *rāga* to its stylistic needs, just as *khyāl* does today, certainly proves that it is *capable* of being an encompassing, universal style like *khyāl*, even though it no longer is so. One can quite possibly envisage a resurgence of *thumri* and its extension to more and more *rāgas* once again (the *ghazal*, a form somewhat similar to the *thumri*, is witnessing such an extension) though the possibility seems to me remote. But the very fact that such a possibility can be visualised is enough for my purposes. It shows that the *thumri* is a possible universal style like *khyāl*.

The same can be said of *tappā* which is almost on the brink of total disappearance. It is today a style without any vitality. There are very few *tappā* singers and the total number of *tappās* one hears may be counted on one's fingers. Yet there was a time when *tappās* were sung in a so-called serious *rāga* like *Pūriyā*:¹⁹ and I would maintain that even if this were not true, the possibility of its becoming so would still be undeniable. Indeed, if there is any style which deserves resurgence it is the *tappā*.

Before I take any further step in speculating on the structural basis of musical style, I would like to point out that style relates not only to structure but also to sensibility. A change in style is an index of a change in sensibility. And sensibility is related to milieu in however tenuous, not-exactly-definable a manner that the relation may have and hence to history and transformations in society. Consider the four major musical styles we have been speaking of. Their marked difference in musical idiom and hence the different sensibilities they express needs no comment. The severe, sombre *dhrupad* with its austere lines and curves is a

¹⁹Dr. Prem Lata Sharma, Head of the Dept. of Musicology, at Banaras Hindu University, recently told me that she heard a musician from Bihar sing a most intricate *tappā* in *Pūriyā*, properly maintaining the *rāga* form. Apparently a tradition of *tappā* singing, which has disappeared from the rest of North India, survives in a remote corner of Bihar.

world removed from the mellifluous *khyāl* of which it is the parent. The "effeminate" eighteenth century social milieu of the court of Muhammad Shah, known as *rangile*, "the colourful one", in which *khyāls* as we know them took shape, was far removed from the more "heroic", war-like, rough period between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries when *dhrupad* emerged out of the earlier *prabandha* form. *Thumri*, lighter in feel and approach than the *khyāl*, emerged out of *khyāl* in the nineteenth century. The *tappā* was born of *thumri*.²⁰ The genius behind this intricate filigree-like form was a Punjab musician named Shorī Miyan, said to have been trained in the *thumri*, style. Other influences moulding the classical *tappā* are not very clear. It does not seem to have much more than its name in common with the popular folk *tappā* of Punjab.

The historical aspect of the emergence of these styles is certainly suggestive of some connection between the successive transformations in music and something "akin" in the emergent social milieux which nurtured them. But with a formal art like music it is difficult to pinpoint the nature of this connection: to speak concretely of what was "akin" in the social structure. In music, where form and content are inextricably merged, the style *is* the sensibility. We cannot separate the expression from what it expresses. We cannot, consequently, speak of any concrete factor in a social structure which music represents or mirrors.

To return to the question of style, I find the category of *tulyadehivat* quite illuminating in understanding the relation between *rāga* and different styles of rendering it. The *tulyadehivat* according to Ānandavardhana occurs when two poems are similar in appearance but different in spirit. What happens to a *rāga* rendered in different styles is analogous. The tonal structure of a *rāga*, its *antaramārga*, remains recognisably the same even with a change of style (otherwise we would not be

²⁰It is not, however, certain whether the *thumri* came before the *tappā* or after it. It should also be remarked here that to make any connection between *tappā* and the social milieu is much more difficult than is the case with the other three styles.

speaking of the same *rāga*), yet a great difference can be felt in spirit. We can recognise, say, *rāga Bihāg*, in a *dhrupad*, a *khyāl*, a *thumrī* or a *ṭappā* as the same *rāga* but the *Bihāg* in each of these cases is expressive of a very different ethos.

Conversely, the *tulyadehivat* can also help us to form a criterion for judging if a new style has been achieved. Today it is the *khyāl* alone where significantly new and exciting experiments are being made in style. The similarities in two *dhrupad* renderings of any *rāga* by two different musicians can, I feel, be more often than not appropriately termed *pratibimbavat*. At best with a more sensitive, creative musician, it does not move beyond the *ālekhyavat*. The reason is that *dhrupad* is a closed, confined style. Transformations are strictly circumscribed and not allowed to stray beyond prescribed limits. This is what allows *dhrupad* to retain its strength and character. But it also prevents it from producing such different styles as we have in the *khyāls* of Amir Khan and Kumar Gandharva, to take two tellingly extreme examples. The difference between two *khyāl* styles is surely in the *tulyadehivat* class.

Though I am tempted here to speculate on the sensibility, or rather the gamut of sensibilities, that modern *khyāl* embodies and their relations with today's milieu, I must now turn to the analysis of the structural components of musical style, the raw material with which it is constituted.

At this point I would like to introduce a rather unfamiliar technical term, the *sthāya*, which I find promising in making the analytical attempt I am aiming at. Śārṅgadeva defines *sthāya* as: "*rāgasya avayavāḥ sthāyāḥ*": "*sthāyas* are the limbs of a *rāga*." The actual music of Śārṅgadeva's days, that is, the early thirteenth century, is no longer available to us, except in imaginative reconstruction: our own music is in many essentials a legacy from it. However, it is clear from Śārṅgadeva's descriptions that in speaking of *sathāya* he has in mind musical phrases, idioms, melodic figures and the like, in other words, organic structural units of a kind a musician would use to "build" any *rāga*. He gives a long list of *sthāyas* which he apparently

considers the basic limbs, organic "building blocks" for constructing a *rāga*; any *rāga*. The *sthāyas* — from the root "*sthā*", "to remain" — are the "constants" which a musician handles in order to make his improvisations.²¹

Modifying Śārṅgadeva a little, I would like to speak of *sthāyas* as the smallest organically meaningful structural units into which the totality of melodic movements in a *style* may be reduced. Following Bharata, I would like to call *sthāyas*, *geya-mātrkā*s. Let me explain. In speaking of dance, ancient theorists distinguish between two basic categories of dance: the *nṛtya* and the *nṛtta*. The *nṛtya* was mimic in purport; one could not speak of *nṛtya* without *abhinaya*, mime. But *nṛtta* was purely formal. Bharata calls it a dance which has no connection with the meaning of any text²² whereas expressing textual meanings was central to *nṛtya*. In analysing the structure of *nṛtta*, Bharata speaks of basic units of movements which he terms *karaṇas*.

He also calls them *nṛtta-mātrkā*s: literally, the "mothers of dance", so named because these in larger clusters constituted the dance as a whole.²³ Abhinava Gupta's comments in explaining the meaning of *karaṇa* are significant. Abhinava describes *karaṇa* as a body movement which has the quality of grace (*gātrāṇām vilāsakṣepa*). He further qualifies it as the smallest movement which is nonpragmatic, not made with a utilitarian purpose, and yet having the sense of a single

²¹ In fact, interestingly, Śārṅgadeva has a short but remarkable section on how a musician can transform given material to make new creations. This can be done in an uncreative way by changing the words or the *rāga* of an old song. But if the musician wishes to retain the *rāga* the path of transformation to follow would be to make a creative change in the *sthāyas*: *rāgaḥ sthāyāntarairnava* (*Saṅgītaratnākara*, 4, 362).

²² *Nāṭyaśāstra* (G.O.S. ed.) Vol. 1, 4, 262. *Nṛtta* is here spoken of as: "*na gītakārthasambaddhaṁ na cāpyarthasya bhāvakam*."

²³ See, however, the article, in this collection entitled *Tanḍu: The First Theoretician of Dance*, where the analysis is more complete and truer to Bharata's text. The *mātrkā*s were, as it emerges there, units smaller than the *karaṇas*. Yet the purport of the point made here remains undisturbed, whether we take the *karaṇa* as the smallest unit or the *mātrkā*.

unit.²⁴ A *karaṇa* is, in other words, the smallest aesthetic block into which *nr̥tta* may be analysed. Clearly, *sthāya*, as I have spoken of it, is a notion analogous to *karaṇa*. This is why I have also called it *geya-mātrkā*, “the mother of song”. *Sthāya* in my sense is the smallest unit into which a musical style may be broken.

Even in common musical parlance we do speak of different *sthāyas* in connection with different musical styles, though we do so loosely. Expressions like *thumrī kā aṅga*, *khyāl ka aṅga*, *dhrupad kā aṅga*, *ṭappe ka aṅga*, (the *aṅga* of *thumrī*, of *khyāl*, of *dhrupad*, of *ṭappā*) are common among musicians. *Aṅga* in such usage is neither unambiguous nor precise. But an important aspect of the meaning of *aṅga* in such contexts is plainly structural. *Dhrupad kā aṅga* means melodic movements typical of the *dhrupad* style, such as *gamak*, the *sūt* and the like. Listed together and further analysed such movements can yield typical *sthāya* units of the style.

Though I have not made the necessary detailed analysis for identifying and listing typical *sthāyas* of various styles, I believe the exercise will yield fruitful results. The *sthāya* approach can be helpful not only in understanding style, but it may also be valuable for understanding the transformation of one style into another. For if *sthāya* can be seen as the basis of style, the transmutation of *sthāya* can be shown to be an important basis of the emergence of a new style. We, in fact, do speak of such a process when we say, for example, “*dhrupad ke aṅga ko khyāl meṁ dhāl liyā*”: “the *aṅga* of *dhrupad* has been moulded into that of *khyāl*”. Mutating a *dhrupad aṅga* to render it into a *khyāl aṅga* is common among musicians, a fact which can easily be demonstrated. The word *aṅga* in such usages stands for certain types of *sthāyas* which can be meaningfully differentiated.

²⁴ Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4, 28-33: “A (graceful) movement distinct from those made in connection with avoiding the undesirable (*heya*) and achieving the desired (*upādeya*) is *karaṇa*... a single movement from one point to another appropriate point is *karaṇa*”. *kriyā karaṇam. kasya kriyā. nr̥ttasya. gātrāṅgāṁ vilasakṣepasya. heyopādeyaviśayakriyādibhyo vyatirikā yā taikriyā karaṇamūtyarthah.*

CHAPTER – THREE

Ancient Indian Music and the Concept of Man

Music does not embody concepts. It cannot. Only language embodies concepts. Yet we are surely tempted to ask: How is change in musical form related to change in the concept of man from one epoch to another? Or in other words: Do changes in musical forms bear any intimate relation with changes in ideas concerning man: his nature, his place in the world, his goals?

Before we can attempt any answer to this question, a tricky problem intrudes: How are we to correlate change in musical forms with change in concepts? Can there be a yard-stick that can gauge relative change with any right and fair degree of dispassion? Let me put the question in another way: Can we on hearing a piece of music, or a corpus of musical forms, have an idea of the concept of man that the music implies or assumes? The answer, I think, cannot really be given in the positive unless we do so in a loose sense and take extra-musical factors like sung-words or the lore surrounding music into account. Conversely, can we on becoming familiar with the concept of man, held by certain musicians, or even certain cultures or epochs, come to know the forms of music they might have created? I doubt if this is possible. Let me take an example: Renaissance in Europe was an age when the entire spirit of the times, both in thought and art was profoundly influenced by classical ideals. A student who knew the general character of the Renaissance but not its music, might expect a similar manifestation in music too. Yet Renaissance musical forms, unlike, painting, sculpture and thought, show no Greek trait. They are basically different. For Greek music was melodic while Renaissance music is polyphonic and harmonic. Let us take another example that is closer to most of us and therefore perhaps more telling: Concepts of man have certainly undergone

many changes in India over the last two centuries within which period a whole new epoch has dawned. Yet do we see a similar transformation in music? We do not. Many people, indeed, complain that music unlike painting, sculpture, architecture and even literature has not changed to suit the modern outlook and ethos.

Let us also look at the matter from another angle. Let us see if profound changes in music are accompanied by analogous changes in concepts and *weltanschauung*. Polyphony was introduced in Europe in the 9th century and it gradually replaced the earlier monodic music by the 12th-13th centuries. No change could be more profound in musical history. But do we perceive a similar change in the concept of man? We do not. The great change from pagan to the Christian ethos had already taken place centuries earlier and Europe from the 5th to the 9th centuries continued to create music within the monodic system it had inherited. No doubt there were transformations: the introduction of new forms and a new spirit, but these were minor compared to the fundamental change that came with polyphony. One can see no change in the European world of thought and ethos that can be associated with this basic change in music.

Now let us take an example from India. During the 14th to 16th centuries, a great change in Indian music took place with the introduction of the *thāt-melakartā* system which superseded the earlier *grāma-mūrchanā* scheme. Accompanying this change in theory was the introduction of the *tānpūrā* as the drone.¹ The historical outlines of this change remains vague in comparison with

¹ The exact date, or even century, when the *tānpūrā* was introduced is still a matter of debate and conjecture. *Tānpūrā* was certainly present in the 17th century, as miniature paintings show. It may have been introduced earlier. However, even if its actual use came after the 16th century, the new music, within which its use became so crucial and almost 'logical' was a product of the period between the 14th and 16th centuries. See also my Hindi article entitled, 'Saṅgita Ke Itihāsa meṁ Śilpa Ki Bhūmikā', *Saṅgita meṁ Anusandhān Ki Samasyāyeṅ aur Kṣetra*, ed. Subhadra Chaudhury, pub. Krishna Brothers, Ajmer, 1988, pp. 111-134 (also included in the volume devoted to Hindi of the present collection) for further reflection on the history of the *tānpūrā*.

what we know from Europe, because music-history in India is hazy in comparison with music-history in Europe. Yet the occurrence of a major change is beyond doubt. But it is difficult to think of a parallel change in the concept of man or in the concepts held by man during that period that can in a relevant sense be said to have accompanied the change in music. True, this was a period of great political upheaval, when the old order was being shattered and was giving place to a new set-up. But the moot point is with what, in this change, can we connect a change in music. I cannot think of any element or conjunction of elements to which one can relevantly point. Islam certainly brought with it many new movements of thought and culture and art. The influence of these on poetry, painting, architecture and social institutions are explicit enough. But the new influence hardly provides any perspective for understanding the change in music. Even the fact that there was a great infusion of new forms in the wake of the conquest does not really afford a satisfactory explanation for the change. For Islamic music is not drone-dominated. Moreover, the change that occurred was nowhere as drastic as the change from monody to polyphony: what happened can, I think, be best characterised as a rearrangement of old forms around a new fulcrum, the drone. No amount of infusion of new forms, let alone a change in *weltanschauung* can explain this phenomenon. A greater change in *weltanschauung* occurred in Indian history with the introduction of British rule, European ideas and ideals; yet all this left music unaffected in its basic forms.

What I have said was intended as a brief cautionary preface to any attempt at understanding music in relation to concepts. I do not mean to deny that many major, enduring movements and currents in music may to some relevant degree be fruitfully understood in the perspective of major movements in ideas and cultural ethos. But this is true of our *attitude* to music rather than its form and the relation between these two remain weak, slender and ambiguous. Let me illustrate this in relation to *sāma* and some later currents in musical culture. We cannot really explain the forms which *sāma* and later music took from what we know

of the Vedic and later concepts of man and his place in the world.² But the ideas held about music, the lore surrounding it, can certainly be understood illuminatingly in the light of a larger *weltanschauung*. It can help us understand concepts and attitudes about music, even if it does not really explain its forms. Attitudes to music, the concepts we hold about its value and nature create the ethos and audience in which music is made. Understanding these is important for an understanding of the musical culture within which forms are created, cherished and preserved, if not the forms themselves.

The Vedic world view was dominated by the concept of the *yajña*. For the Vedic people *sāma* music like the Vedic *mantra* was not created but revealed, *dr̥ṣṭa*; also like the Vedic *mantra* it was immutable: not a syllable could be changed in a *mantra* and not a note in a *sāma*. Like the *mantra*, *sāma* was associated with *yajña*. Inherent in the Vedic concept of *yajña* was an idea of cosmic cofunctioning and reciprocation: through *yajña*, gods and men entered into a relation of give and take.

The image of the cosmos that emerges from Vedic concepts is that of an organic whole consisting of discrete parts functioning reciprocally in unison. I would like in this context to relate a story from a *Brāhmaṇa* text, the *Jaiminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, belonging to the *Jaiminiya śākhā* of the *Sāmaveda*.³ The story concerns a dispute for supremacy among six gods: Agni, Vāyu, Āditya, Prāṇa, Anna and Vāk. Each stakes his claims with arguments. Agni says: 'I am the mouth of the

²The major reason lies in the fact that Ancient *sāma* is not known to us in its ancient form; a great deal of *sāma* survives but we cannot be sure of its authenticity. Vedic music has certainly changed much more in transmission than the Vedic texts.

³In what follows I rely almost exclusively on the *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, for my thoughts regarding *sāma* and Vedic views in general. What I have said can, I believe, be corroborated from other sources. But I have not done so here. One reason for my exclusive attention to the *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* is to project the importance of this text in music history, an importance hardly, as yet, noticed. My references are to the Tirupati edition of the text; *Jaiminiyārṣeya-Jaiminyopniṣadbrāhmaṇe*, Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyāpīṭha, Tirupati, 1967.

gods. And of men. To me are given the *yajña* offerings. I distribute foods to the gods and men. Without me gods and men would remain without a mouth with which to feed themselves. There would be no *yajña* offerings and consequently no food for gods or men. The whole purpose of existence will be defeated. Nothing will remain." All gave assent to Agni's words. Without him, they all agreed, nothing will remain. Then Vāyu spoke: "I am the *prāṇa*, the breath of life in the gods. And in men. If I go away, life, too, shall be washed away. Without me all will be defeated and nothing will remain". All gave assent to Vāyu's words, too. Without him, they agreed, nothing will remain.

The other gods argued in a similar vein till each saw the truth of the others claim. They saw that each was dependent on the other (*ekaikāmevānu smaḥ*) and without anyone of them the whole will be defeated (*yannu naḥ sarvāsām devatānāmekācana na syāt tata idaṁ sarvaṁ parābhavet*).⁴

This mode of reciprocal functioning, with each part performing its innate function was in the Vedic view what made the whole cosmos exist and move. The true, inherent rhythm of this movement, a rhythm which made everything fall into its proper place and season (*ṛtu*), was *ṛta*. Man was as much part of *ṛta* as were the gods: both interdependent on each other, acting as it were, as counterpoints to each other. Indeed, the Vedic conception of the cosmos, readily brings to mind the image of an orchestra playing different melodies to produce a single harmony.

This conception was reflected in the performance of the *yajña* ritual, too. It was a ritual performed by a group of priests with different functions, acting in unison. Part of the ritual in the more important *yajñas* was the singing of hymns to the gods. This was done by the *sāma* priests, who sung *ṛcas* from the *Rgveda* to music, which like the *ṛcas* themselves, was revealed and transcendental. *Sāma* itself was sung by a group of three singers, the *prastotā*, the *pratiharā* and the *udgātṛ* often aided by a number of subsidiary singers, the *upagātṛs*. To each of the

⁴*Jaiminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, 4, 8, 1-3.

three main singers was assigned a different part of the five or seven part *sāma*-structure. One of the parts was sung by two musicians separately. The finale was sung by all together.

Connected with the Vedic concept of *rta* was the notion of what has been termed cosmic correspondences. Everything in this world, however, seemingly disparate had an inner mystic correspondence with other things, a correspondence which is often spoken of as a relation of identity. Every part of the *yajña* ritual had a cosmic correspondent which often also provided its *raison d'être*. Similarly, every element in the human microcosm had its correspondent in the macrocosm. The *Brāhmaṇa* and *Āraṇyaka* texts are full of such correspondences. I would like to quote here an example that concerns *sāma*. A *sāma* we have said, could be sung in seven parts, these were the seven *bhaktis*, named:

1. *hīnkāra* 2. *prastāva* 3. *ādi* (or *praṇava*) 4. *udgītha*
5. *Pratihāra* 6. *upadrava* 7. *nidhana*

The *Jaiminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* speaks of a relation of identity between these *bhaktis* and various aspects of the cosmos. Thus each *bhakti* is said to correspond to a different quarter in the space: *hīnkāra* is the east, *prastāva*, the south, *ādi*, the west, *udgītha*, the north, *pratihāra* is that quarter, *upadrava* is the *antarikṣa* and *nidhana* is this quarter.⁵ Another passage says: *Hīnkāra* is mind, *prastāva* is Speech, *udgītha* is *prāṇa*, the life-breath; *hīnkāra* is the Moon, *prastāva* is Fire, *udgītha* is *Āditya*, the Sun, and so on.⁶ At another place we find: *hīnkāra* is the season of spring, *prastāva* summer, *udgītha* is the season of rain, *pratihāra* autumn and *nidhana*, winter. It is worth mentioning in parenthesis that this ancient feeling for correspondence has echos in our own assigning of different seasons to different *rāgas*. The idea that different musical forms could correspond to different hours of the day, has also an ancient parallel, for another passage reads: *hīnkāra* is the hour before sunrise, *prastāva* is the hour of

⁵ *Jaiminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, 1, 10, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.* 1, 11, 1.

the half-risen sun, *ādi* is the hour when cows set forth for pasture, the midday is *udgītha*, *pratihāra* is the afternoon, *upadrava*, the hour of dusk when the sky becomes red and *nidhana* the hour when the sun has set.⁷

The ancient Vedic concept of man and his relation to gods and the world was clearly a concept of mutuality and innate inter-relationships. It was a concept, given which one would reasonably expect its expression in music to be in the form of polyphony. There was even the presence of group singing. And yet from all accounts and evidence the music was monodic. Indeed, all subsequent music history in India, which avowedly begins with *sāma*, is a history of monodic music. But music could quite conceivably have taken an entirely different form right from the Vedic period.

Perhaps even more than the forms of *sāma*, the Vedic attitude to *sāma* has played a crucial role in subsequent musical history. The Vedic regard for *sāma* shines out bright and clear from all their deliberations. It shines out even from the little we have quoted and that from a single text. *Sāma* for the ancients was an essential element in the ritual process and consequently an essential element in the total harmony of the world. Through *sāma* one could participate in *rta*.

Through it one could also attain *amṛta*, supreme immortal being. It could lead one to *brahma*, the highest transcendental truth and knowledge; and it could be the source of *rasa*, the greatest bliss on this earth here and now. In *Jaiminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, the *gāyatra sāma* is identified with the mystic syllable *Om*, which is identified with supreme *brahma*.⁸ *Om* is the foundation on which the world stands. A legend related in this *Brāhmaṇa*, reports a question which *Prthu*, son of *Vena*, asked of the divine *vrātyas*: the heavens, he said in a verse, rest on *Sūrya*, the *Sūrya* on *Prthvī* and the *Prthvī* on *Āpah*, the primal waters, on what, he asked, do

⁷ *Ibid.* 1, 12, 1. For quite another, more analytic view of the contemporary *rāga*-time relation prevalent in Hindustani music see: 'An Enquiry Into the Rāga-Time Association In The Light of History', in this volume.

⁸ *Jaiminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*, 1, 1, 1.; 1, 11, 6; 1, 2, 2.

these waters rest? *Om* was the answer.⁹ This *gāyatra sāma* is elsewhere in the *Brāhmaṇa* identified with *amṛta*: “*tadetadamṛtam gāyatram/ etena vai prajāpatiramṛtatvamagacchat/ etena devāḥ. etena ṛṣayaḥ.*”¹⁰ *Gāyatra* is the instrument by which the noose of death can be loosened.¹¹

Sāma is, therefore, an *upāsana*: a path to ultimate realization. *Āruṇi* asked *Vāsiṣṭha Caikitāneya* as to which god he worshipped. “We worship *sāma*”, was the proud answer: *Agni*, *Ṛṥhvī*, the primal waters (*Āpah*), the *Antarikṣa*, the heavens, he added were all but aspects of *sāma* (*Jaiminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* 1, 14, 1).

Sāma, then, was cherished with the greatest esteem that the Vedic people harboured for what they valued. One could, however, object here that *sāma* was prized not for its music but for the *ṛk mantras*, the really cherished possessions of which the *sāma* music was no more than a vehicle. This was not so, for *sāma* was a revealed form in its own right, just as the *ṛcās*. Further in many cases *sāma* was plainly valued for music alone. An example is that of the *anṛca sāma*. *Anṛca sāma* was a form of *sāma* that had no *ṛk* base and was sung to meaningless syllables.¹² A story speaks of its transcendental powers. The gods coveted heaven. But try as they might, they could not attain their goal. Frustrated, they went to *Prajāpati* for his advice. *Prajāpati* told them that they could attain, *svarga*, the heavenly world of light, through *anṛca sāma*. The gods, therefore, emptied the *sāma* of its *mantra* content and through it attained *svarga*.¹³

Aśarira sāma was perhaps another name for *anṛca sāma* (for the *ṛk* has been called the *śarira* of *sāma* in the above story).¹⁴ A legend, seemingly historical, tells of the great occult powers of

⁹ Ibid. 1, 2, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid. 3, 7, 3.

¹¹ Ibid. 4, 7, 1. *Yajña* is here identified with *Puruṣa*: *Puruṣa* with *udgītha*. The singing of *udgītha* loosens all the knots with which death binds the *yajamāna*.

¹² For a more detailed discussion see the essay, collected here, entitled, ‘The Search For the *Apauruṣeya* or Absolute in Music’, especially pp. 286-305.

¹³ Ibid. 1, 4, 1.

¹⁴ Ibid. 1, 4, 1.

aśarira sāma. *Kaupyeya Uccaiṣravā*, the king of *Kurus*, was a close and dear friend of *Keśi Dārbhya*, the king of *Pāñcāla*. *Uccaiṣravā* died, leaving *Dārbhya* sad and sorrowful. Once when *Dārbhya* had gone out hunting, he saw *Uccaiṣravā* in the woods. *Dārbhya* tried to embrace his friend. But *Uccaiṣravā* was like empty space or the insubstantial wind, he was disembodied. *Dārbhya* could not touch him. ‘What has happened to your body and form?’ he asked his friend. In reply *Uccaiṣravā* spoke of the *aśariri sāma*, The power of the *sāma*, he said, had removed from him the dross of flesh and he was now a disembodied spirit. Through *aśariri sāma*, he said, a man could attain the abode of gods. He asked *Dārbhya* to look for a *brāhmaṇa* who knew this *sāma*. Since it was through this *sāma* that the gods themselves had become disembodied spirits. *Dārbhya* searched everywhere in his kingdom but found none who knew this *sāma*. Then one day he met a *brāhmaṇa* named *Pratṛda Bhalla* who lived in a *śmasāna* (a cemetery). *Pratṛda Bhalla* was an expert in *aśarira-sāma*. The *śarira-sāma*, the *sāma* sung to *ṛcās*, he said, was within the reach of Death, but *aśarira-sāma* was *amṛta* (*atha yadaśariram tadamṛtam*). Finally, through the power of this *sāma*, *Bhalla* turned *Dārbhya* into a disembodied god.¹⁵

The story illustrates the ancients’ belief in the power of music alone in certain of its forms. Music was for them capable of magical transcendental powers. It was perhaps practised in this capacity within certain esoteric circles as the association of *Pratṛda Bhalla* with the *śmasāna* suggests. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that *Bhalla*, according to the story, was opposed by the more ‘regular’ *sāma*-singers of *Dārbhya*’s kingdom. I would here like to note, in passing, that this legend is the earliest precursor that I know of, of the later stories about occult powers that certain musicians, such as *Tānsen* possessed and similar powers inherent in certain musical forms, such as *rāga Dipaka*.

¹⁵ Ibid. 3, 6, 1 to 3, 7, 1.

I have tried to stress the Vedic people's regard for music at some length because this early attitude struck deep roots in the Indian psyche and kept the impulse to music alive under certain overwhelming attacks that hit at the very base of the impulse. The attacks came from what may be called the *sanyāsic weltanschauung* that had its source in a very ancient *muni* or *śramaṇa* tradition, but which grew to overpower the Indian mind in the epoch which produced great *sanyāsīs* like the Buddha, Mahavīra and a host of lesser, though cumulatively very influential, teachers. The Vedic fold itself was moved by the *sanyāsic* ideal, and the older ideal of *yajña* and *ṛta* lost its vigour and vitality. This ideal was now on the defensive and was being metamorphosed by the incorporation of new elements, many of which were quite alien to its former spirit.

Music had no place in the *sanyāsic weltanschauung*. The world in this view was nothing but misery, *duḥkha*. Man was bound to the world by desire and he was bound to suffer in an endless cycle of births as long as this bondage lasted. Liberation lay in transcending the world to *nirvāṇa* or *mokṣa*, where alone was bliss. The road to *nirvāṇa* led away from the allure of the senses and its objects which tied man to the world through desire. All that tempted man to the world was to be shunned. This included music, for music fed the sensual fire. The ban on music encompassed all music, for music was an intoxicant by nature.

In practice, however, music in some of its forms was accepted. No ideal however austere and music-shunning ever totally rejects music when translated into a large cultural movement. But the only function that music could rightly have was to act as a vehicle for words which expressed the *sanyāsic* ideal and the *sanyāsic* experience. Music in its pure forms, too, was certainly tolerated, and many who were moved by the *sanyāsic* ideal were, no doubt, moved by music, too; but music was, in the ultimate analysis, an alien intruder in this world. To the Vedic people music could be an *upāsana*, a path divine; now it was fuel for *vāsanā*, the path of eternal misery.

It is easy to see why we hear of no distinctive Buddhist or Jain music. There was no true impulse for music in the Buddhist or Jain ethos. Yet this world-view had consequential ramifications in music history. For like the Vedic *weltanschauung*, the *sanyāsic* ethos too exercised a deep influence on the Indian mind. The presence of these two contrary attitudes was bound to produce a tension and ambivalence that has left its stamp in the history of all subsequent musical culture.¹⁶

After the age of *sāma*, music found its next great creative impulse in the theistic cults of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. These cults had grown from small beginnings in the Vedic age, and had imbibed and amalgamated much from different strands of worship and thought current in the subsequent period of spiritual and intellectual ferment through which they grew. These cults claimed to embody the essence of the Vedas. This could be questioned, for there was much that was new in them and what there was of the old was much transformed. Yet much of the Vedic spirit did abide in them though in new garbs. Just as for the Vedic people, ritual in these cults was a vital element of religious life, and music was vital for ritual. But the ritual had much that was new in form and ethos. So had the music.

The new sacred form or corpus of music, created in the devotional atmosphere of the cults, was *gāndharva*, it was dedicated to the worship of gods, especially Śiva. *Gāndharva*, the ancient texts say, was metamorphosed from the *sāmic* gamut of forms. It was also cherished and valued in an analogous manner both as ritual and as a form spiritual. Like *sāma*,

¹⁶ We thus find a defence of music in later saṅgīta texts, prompted, no doubt, by the strictures in the *Smṛtis*, which are deprecatory of music, especially musicians, who are in some passages even forbidden to enter cities, and live *with* the citizens. This is, obviously intended as a device to save the citizens from the musician's immoral influence. Music itself is, however, not forbidden. In fact, some forms of music are extolled by *Smṛtis* and *Purāṇas* (which are often bracketed with *Smṛtis* as texts and *dharma*) themselves as divine. The *Yājñvalkyā Smṛti* extols the singing and playing of musical forms such as the *gitakas* of *gāndharva* (for *gitakas*, see my *A Study of Dattilam*, Impex India, Delhi, 1978). In *bhakti*, music was included as part of *sādhanā*.

gāndharva is important in later musical history not only as a form which was the fountain-head of much later development but also the spirit behind it and the attitude towards music it presented.

CHAPTER – FOUR

Words and Music

It is not uncommon to hear people complain against classical singing that words sung are so distorted that they can hardly be understood. Another complaint, which often goes with this, is that lyrics sung by classical musicians are of an inferior poetic quality. Those who voice these complaints are often persons who have a greater rapport with poetry than with music. It is not difficult to answer them back. A number of poets who give public recitations sing their poems. It is certainly reasonable to demand that they should pay proper attention to the quality of the music. This they rarely do. It is common to hear a poet publicly sing his poem full-throatedly to a poor piece of music in a bad voice quite out of tune.

Bickering, however, can get one nowhere. Moreover, complaints against the use and quality of words in classical music are voiced not only by indifferent music lovers but also by some musicians themselves. It will, I think, be more fruitful to try and understand the question of the way or ways in which words may relate to music.

Music and poetry, it will be generally admitted, are quite capable of great power on their own. Yet singing always has to make use of words. It seems, therefore, legitimate to complain that since words are necessary in music they should be used with taste and proper aesthetic care towards the poetic meaning being conveyed.

But when I say words are necessary in singing, what I mean, strictly, is that syllables or vocables are necessary for singing. This can be done without using meaningful words. Since ancient times — at least since the days of Bharata — musicians have been able to get across the problem of using syllables without using words. They have been using nonsense syllables: *stobhākṣaras*, or as Bharata calls them, *śuṣkāṣaras*. Current music has its own corpus of

nonsense syllables which are used in singing *tarānā* and in *ātāpa*.

It will seem an insignificant truism to assert that in making music musical values dominate. But we tend to forget this when we complain that classical singers distort the words they sing. A classical singer is intent upon building melodic wealth so as to give form to a *rāga*. Words obviously cannot create a *rāga*; the singer thus feels free to distort them if the melodic line so demands. One should remember that singers have been distorting words since the days of Vedic *sāma* music, in which a number of distortions were accorded due sanction and were termed *sāma-vikāras*. These *vikāras* were various ways in which words were distorted and twisted in singing *sāma*. Classical singers then, have the strength of 'divine' sanction behind them. In complaining against them, I feel, one should rather complain that in paying overmeticulous attention towards proper intonation of words, a musician has impoverished a *rāga* or has deprived us of melodic riches.

In what I have said above, I have perhaps been too extreme in defending the musical autonomy of classical singing. This, I think, is needed. But one can still ask the question: Are music and poetry forms that can never be significantly associated? It would certainly be absurd to assert this. The association between music and poetry is an old one and this alone is proof enough that they go well together.

Meaningful association between two or more art-forms which can be said to be autonomous in themselves, is a common fact of aesthetic experience. There are a number of composite art-forms in which 'independent' arts are combined to create a meaningful and homogenous aesthetic whole. Drama is one such art, so is film. Drama uses quite different arts and skills to create the total effect that it does. The same is the case with film. Dance, too, as we know it, is a composite art; for it is always associated with music (a dance performance was in ancient times also known as *saṅgītaka*).

Music has similarly been associated with poetry. The association is and has been of a very varied kind. In forms like the *khyāl* words can become pegs on which to hang the music. There are also forms in which a tune becomes the peg on which to hang

words. Yet there are other forms in which the two are more evenly associated, where the blend is so balanced that the one enriches the other and still creates a total whole — *Thumri* can be cited as an example, though in *thumri*, I feel, music has the upper hand, in spite of the fact that words play a greater role than in *khyāl*. An example of a more balanced association would be that of *ghazal*, especially as sung by certain great *ghazal* singers like Begum Akhtar. Her music has grace, charm, finesse and melodic wealth; but it is nevertheless, enriched in its total effect by the poetic content, to which it likewise, adds a new aesthetic dimension. Her music is certainly enjoyable on its own, but it does not form as profound a musical experience as does the *khyāl* when rendered by a master such as, for example, Amir Khan.

Another form, in which, to my mind, music and poetry are beautifully wedded, is the traditional *padāvali kīrtan* of Bengal. Here a great tradition of music as well as of poetry combine to create a deep and moving experience. Each art enhances the power of the other and for those who have experienced the effect, they become virtually inseparable.

There are other approaches to singing in which music or poetry become more or less dominant. Indeed one criterion which may be broadly said to demarcate more 'classical' from 'lighter' forms of sung music is the lesser or greater dominance of the word content. Bharata, too, had evidently recognised this criterion when distinguishing between the more 'classical' *gāndharva* music of his age and contemporary theatrical songs (*gāna*), he stated that the approach to *pada*, or sung words was radically different in the two. In *gāndharva*, words were subservient to the music whereas in theatrical songs, words naturally formed the dominant element.

Our music has a rich repertoire of varied forms. Not all forms seek the same kind of effect. Our insistence that all singing should seek to express the feelings of the sung poem is really a demand for introducing a single goal in all music-making and denying to music the autonomy it has cherished for centuries. Such a demand would put unnecessary boundaries to our own aesthetic experience.

CHAPTER – FIVE

Why Study Ancient Musical Texts ?

I

The question that forms the title of this essay is not intended to be rhetorical or just a verbal device to catch attention. The value of studying ancient musical texts is by no means generally granted, even by those who are seriously involved in the pursuit of music. It is common enough to be accosted with the question: Of what use is the study of old texts for an understanding of our musical art as we practise it today ?

As a student of ancient musical texts, I would like to ponder over this question and enter into some of its ramifications in order to seek answers.

There is often a curious paradox in our attitude to the past. Although in a certain mood of denunciation, we cast doubt on the value of studying old texts, yet, in a different frame of mind, we proudly proclaim and extol our music as age-old, rooted in time immemorial. More often than not, however, this latter sentiment hardly amounts to anything more than paying lip-service to the past; the purpose, at times, being just to add value to the present, hike up the price of what we have by calling it an antique.

The truth remains that an understanding and appreciation of the historical dimension has never been a major aspect of our musical culture, or, for that matter, culture in general. It was common enough to praise the past, as it still is, or emulate it. But this attitude never gave rise to any concerted effort to study the forms and achievements of the past in any kind of a historical perspective. No real attempt was made to perceive forms of the past as points in a process of change, a process itself worthy of serious study.

Early writers on music have, no doubt, described and even, in a skeletal form, notated older music as it was current during their time, or as they found it outlined in earlier texts. But they

hardly ever asked themselves the historian's questions: How, through what process, have forms changed ? How did newer forms come out of the old and in the shape they did ? Why did change take place, what was its character, what were the factors that led to it ? Even if the old texts do sometimes speak of these matters, they do so indirectly, in the course of speaking of other things, or in a very cursory, superficial manner. Such questions were never uppermost in their mind. Certain writers of the older texts were so indifferent to chronology that in describing or naming forms, they did not bother to keep the old and the new apart. Modern scholars have remarked on the frustrating difficulties of historically sifting the forms described in a number of musical texts.

Compared to the past, history today receives far more serious thought in musical circles. Historical questions engage our minds and provide an impulse for earnest enquiry. A direct access to a greater range of forms (created over a relatively larger span of time) is also now available to us, thanks to the invention of recording devices. We can now actually hear a musician of the past, even if only of the recent past, on recordings. Our experience remains fragmentary, limited to bits and scraps which were recorded — and that, too, quite indifferently by more modern standards; yet to be able to actually hear an Abdul Karim, a musician separated from us by two generations, would have been unimaginable in earlier times. This extension in our range certainly adds to the total quality of our experience and widens our response.

But though, more responsive, in some ways, to history, a historical awareness has not quite become ingrained in our general outlook. A non-chalant disregard for history shows itself, for example, in the interminable quarrels over the 'purity' of the *rāga*. The notion of 'purity' is, in such contexts, admittedly complex; but it has an aspect that is certainly historical. To elucidate this point, I would like to examine some of the assumptions which we tacitly make when we discuss the 'purity' of a *rāga*. One assumption is that a *rāga* was created once and for all at a certain point in time, and every individual rendering of it is an attempt at

a true copy of the original, pristine form. The more successful the attempt, the 'purer' the *rāga*. Variants occur because of 'impure' copies multiplied over time, and against these one must be on guard. Implied clearly are two further assumptions: one, that we always have direct access to the original blue-print of a *rāga*, for otherwise we cannot speak of true copies; two, that *rāga*-s are conceived as immutable forms to be transmitted in every specific detail.

Now, to decide whether these assumptions are justified or not surely calls for a probe into the manner in which *rāga*-s are conceived and transmitted in our tradition and how good our chances are of reaching back to the original form of a *rāga*, especially if it is an old *rāga*. What is called for is, in short, a historical probe. But though we are often quick in passing judgements with respect to 'purity', we hardly undertake the necessary enquiry.

The truth is that quarrels over 'purity' usually boil down to quarrels over favourites. These are, more often than not, battles between partisans supporting different artists or loyal to certain *gharanā*-s, battles in which 'purity' is bandied about as a weapon. The interest is not really in discovering this 'purity' whose roots lie in the past, but in championing a cause.

In the Indian poetic tradition, a discerning *sahrdaya* — a man who could aesthetically respond to a poetic utterance — had before him a large body of literature, spread over centuries. The nature of a *sahrdaya*'s response, however, hardly took the historical factor into account; it was largely aesthetic. In evaluating poems, questions like when it was written, how it was historically connected with prior works, how it reflected its own period of time, were rarely taken into consideration. Much thought was expended on certain problems; What distinguished a poetic utterance from utterances in general? What constituted poetic merits and blemishes? What were the distinguishing characteristics of the aesthetic experience which poetry aroused? The almost unanimous answer to this last question was: *rasa*, understood as a conglomerate of factors that differentiated the

aesthetic from other experiences. *Rasa*, interestingly enough, was placed in a realm beyond time, like the mystic experience. No wonder, then, that poets separated by centuries were evaluated without really taking these intervening centuries into account. The attitude, to use the terminology of linguistics and social science, was synchronic, rather than diachronic. The history of Sanskrit literature was not born, understandably enough, till modern times.

Our musical culture today, is, in its aesthetic attitude, similar to the ancient poetic culture; a historical interest has come to be a part of it but this interest is still peripheral. We value forms for themselves, for the wealth and variety of aesthetic experience they can afford us. We are not really interested in probing into how forms are linked over time, how they change, how one leads to another or moves away from another. We respond to what appeals, without caring much for how it is embedded in time and history. The fact that the notion of *rasa* looms so large in our evaluation of music is also to a degree indicative of its ahistorical character: the *rasa* mode of aesthetic perception cannot take history into account.

My purpose here is not to deny that art can transcend time. On the contrary, I quite share the view that art is nothing if it does not have something to say to us here and now, whenever it may have been created. Greek sculpture, the ancient Indian temples, the Ajanta murals, Renaissance painting, to name only a few random examples, are great creations of art, not merely because of their historical importance, but because they have a quality of being more than-contemporary; we can respond to them across time, in spite of time. They all belong to a realm of *rasa* which is beyond time.

Yet, if the purpose of art is to enrich experience, then viewing objects of art with some understanding of their history, undoubtedly, adds a new magnitude to our awareness of their nature. History gives a perspective to our consciousness by placing objects in a total cultural milieu both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, as an object placed alongside many

others at a certain moment of time; vertically, as an object viewed in company with those that came before and followed across time. This perspective helps us to understand the dynamic inter-connections between forms, how they interact with each other as well as with the general human situation of which they are a part. We learn how and in what aspect they change or remain constant.

II

The sole reason why the history of music in India remains neglected or weak as part of our way of looking at our creations is not because of any disinclination to study its development. There are also certain other problems inherent in any exploration of this kind. History can be studied only through the traces left by the past. In studying art-history, the major traces or data are the art-objects themselves. For social, economic, and political history, the historian does not need to have a direct observation of those events, people, movements and forces which he seeks to study. He can derive the knowledge he needs from other kinds of evidence: documents, records, literature and similar other traces of the past and these are often enough for his purposes; such data, indeed, are the standard grist for the historian's mill. One need not directly perceive an event or an act in order to understand it.

But art by its very nature, imposes a different demand. In art, the palpable particular, the form as it was created, is of supreme importance. For the secret of art lies in the actual object of art, something that can be directly, sensuously, apprehended

This is where the historian of music in India faces an insurmountable hurdle. Beyond a certain period, and a period which hardly extends beyond the very recent past, direct experience of music as actually rendered becomes almost an impossibility. In the field of plastic arts and of literature, forms have survived from the distant past, though with greater or lesser abundance for different periods. These forms, moreover, can be arranged more or less securely within demarkable epochs and often within fairly narrow limits of chronology. We actually

have architecture, sculpture and painting dating back to two thousand years and more which can be viewed in this manner. But can we say the same for music or the other performing arts for that matter?

Many, it is sure, would assert that we do indeed have ancient musical forms even today. Our contemporary classical music, they would say, embodies forms which are, in truth, age-old. But how old our forms are, and in what exact sense 'old', is a moot question. A look at the nature of the tradition in which they have been preserved and are handed over will, I believe, throw some light on the matter.

In the west, music going back from the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries to the Renaissance, and even to some extent to the Middle Ages, has been preserved more or less in the shape it was originally created. This has been done through a sophisticated system of notation and an endeavour, rooted in western musical culture, to preserve compositions intact (an endeavour, which today has become more than ever refined through research, resulting in attempts by learned bodies to recapture the very tone of old music through, for example, instruments reconstructed as they were in the past). True, we listen to the early western composers only through renderings by modern conductors and performers and it is well-known that a conductor or performer will impart his own interpretative nuance to a work, even if unconsciously. Yet a contemporary interpretation of earlier music is never allowed to stray too far from the original, notations of which can always be referred back to. Any performance of Bach remains unmistakably Bach despite differences in approach.

Things are quite different in Indian classical music, more markedly perhaps in its Hindustani form. When we hear a Bhimsen Joshi or a Kumar Gandharva, or any other great contemporary, singing *khyāl*-s by the eighteenth century composers, Sadāraṅg or Adāraṅg, it is impossible in principle to tell how much of the music to which we are listening is truly eighteenth century music.

One reason is that though we clamour for 'purity' and wage battles over it, yet, paradoxically enough, we consider no artist an *ustād*, a master, if he is not truly original. What we cherish in an artist is his individual creative genius, his unique musical vision. Even older masters, with whom we are still closely familiar, Faiyaz Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Amir Khan, were all prized for this quality. An *ustād*, moreover, is not expected to show creative genius merely through composing new pieces and developing a new style and idiom in which he renders these new pieces. What is really expected of him is that his own unique imagination and artistic conception should be writ large on whatever he is performing, whether it is a Sadāraṅg *khyāl* or his own composition. A sensitive western performer or conductor, too, may have a unique style, an individual flavour that enters into whatever he renders, but never do we mistake Bach's creation for another's. On the other hand, a great Hindustani performer is more akin to a creative Renaissance sculptor, who, in copying a Greek or Roman model, transformed it into something quite his own.

The value placed by modern Hindustani music culture on uniqueness of vision in rendering *khyāl* is not an accidental or contingent matter. It is not a new and sudden growth, entirely different in spirit from Indian musical culture and tradition as a whole. Even a little reflection will show that the factor which accounts for the Hindustani musician's cultivation of uniqueness is a factor which evidently has been inherent in Indian music for centuries. I have in mind the central role we have assigned to improvisation.

Improvisation is woven into the very fabric of our music-making. In teaching forms, what is transmitted is not only a corpus of music but also a manner and technique of improvisation, the two elements being inextricably interwoven. Hindustani music, in its *khyāl* and allied forms, perhaps places more stress on improvisation, but in this, it only errs on the right side and does not introduce a totally new element uncharacteristic of our music. Evidently, it was always the practice in our music that a *śiṣya* could become a master not

merely through being able to reproduce forms, however skilfully and expressively, but by succeeding in handling forms he had learnt in such a manner as to transform them creatively. A man of towering genius could even gloriously transfigure them.

The role of improvisation seems however to have varied in degree and extent. It could be subjected to greater or lesser constraints. Thus compared to the Hindustani tradition, Karnatic music has been exercising more controls on improvisation by limiting it more strictly, at least in certain areas such as the rendering of *kṛti*-s. Compositions of old masters like Tyāgrāja are carefully guarded from the mutating encroachment of improvisation. Consequently, we have a more secure assurance that *kṛti*-s have been handed down undistorted. In the North, on the other hand, an old *chiz* (composition) can have as many sharply distinct variations as *gharānā*-s, or even musicians; since within a *gharānā*, too, individual variations are not uncommon.

But improvisation, though confined, is still given a major role in Karnatic music. A *kṛti* within a *rāga* may be carefully guarded from mutation but the totality of a *rāga*-presentation does allow plenty of room for improvisation. How much of this has slowly crept into the *kṛti*-s themselves poses a genuine question.

The basic problem for a historian, in this context, is how to measure the extent of variation in an old form. Seeking an answer is a frustrating exercise because there was no sophisticated system of notation subtle enough to record all the contours of a *kṛti* or a *chiz* before recent times, against which a check may be made. We are, perforce, left to intelligent guesses on the basis of known musical practice and tradition.

But even if we grant that in the *kṛti*-s we have truly been able to preserve old music in the original, how far back does this take us? Hardly more than two centuries.

Dhrupad, one may say, takes us further back. And it is certainly true that *dhrupad* as a form and style goes back to the fifteenth century and perhaps earlier. But the pertinent question again surely is: how old are the *dhrupad*-s that we have? No exact answer can be given. Many *dhrupad*-s are certainly older than

the current *khyāls*, and *dhrupad*, in general, undoubtedly, preserves an earlier musical idiom. Also, relative to the *khyāl*, *dhrupad* is guarded with greater caution against mutating influences. Still, it is difficult to get rid of the feeling that this care to preserve *dhrupad*-s has acquired greater favour only after the ascendancy of the *khyāl*. Earlier *dhrupad*-s too seem to have been in a similar state of flux: witness, for example, the great variations to be found in the same *dhrupad* as sung in different *gharānā*-s. The element that varies sometimes is not only a pattern here and there, within the same *rāga*, but the *rāga* itself. We find that the same Tansen *dhrupad* is sung to one *rāga* in the Dagar *gharānā*, but to a different *rāga* in Vishnupur. A further complexity is added by the presence in the past of four *bānis*, four different modes of rendering *dhrupad*, which must also have multiplied mutations.¹

Here, again, in the absence of a proper notation system before recent times, it is impossible to gauge the extent to which improvisation has transformed forms. A search for the original can turn out to be, as the proverb goes, like a hunt for the primal trunk of an ancient, overgrown banyan tree. Unlike in the west, no need was felt in India to develop a sophisticated system of notation for recording music with exactitude. A notation system has been in existence for some centuries, at least since the *Bṛhaddeśī* (circa 7th century AD), but it was too crude to be an appropriate vehicle for the music it was meant to record. The little that has been recorded is moreover, skeletal and minimal, besides being, for us, enigmatic. It cannot convey a true picture of the totality of music that obtained. The reason why so little was recorded was that, as is the case today, what was conveyed from one generation to another consisted not only of a collection of forms, but also of modes and principles of improvisation by which to develop them; notation could be of no more than rudimentary or secondary use for this purpose. Before the introduction of recording devices like the gramophone disc and

¹On this matter of the historical relation between the *dhrupad* as we have it and the *khyāl*, I would like to refer the reader to my Hindi article, 'Dhrupad Kā itihās: ek naī dr̥ṣṭi kā āgrah', vol. II of this collection (in preparation); also the journal 'Dhrupad' *Vārsikī*, 1987, pp. 16-30.

the tape-recorder, a full-fledged musical structure, such as that of a *rāga*, could never be captured in its entirety.

Given the material that we have and the nature of the tradition, an attempt to reconstruct the music of the past in any palpable form does not appear to be a promising venture. Yet attempts are certainly worth making and perhaps with more research and greater knowledge in depth, the notation preserved in works like the *Bṛhaddeśī* (circa 7th century AD), the *Saṅgita Ratnākara* (13th century AD) will begin acquiring a breath of life instead of remaining mere signs to puzzle over.

It would be interesting here to note that Rāṇā Kumbha, the famous Mewar King, had in the fifteenth century made an attempt to recapture old forms. In introducing his monumental *Saṅgitarāja*, he asserts that he had not only read descriptions of ancient forms in ancient texts, he had also tried to experience these forms directly ('*anubhūyārthataḥ*:' *Saṅgitarāja*, 1, 1, 1, 37). Later in his work he even gives his own reconstruction of *jātis*, *kambala gāna* and the like, forms which in his days were no longer extant. The attempt seems to have been, in many essentials, a failure, as I have elsewhere tried to show (*A Study of Dattilam*, pp. 180-181). But it was certainly an attempt worth making. Also for his times, it was a rare endeavour. Again in his commentary on the *Gītagovinda*, Jayadeva's celebrated poem composed in the twelfth century, Rāṇā Kumbha tells us that he had searched for a commentary on the work that could reveal the music to which it was set. Finding none, he set Jayadeva's *aṣṭapadis* to his own music (*Rasikapriyā*, 1, 15, 16: the entire work is full of musical details; also *Saṅgitarāja* 2, 4, 2, 28-29). For us, *his* music, too, remains a closed book as it is not recorded in notation, but in terms of hints that could have aided a contemporary musician to improvise.

III

But if we have no music from ancient times, we have a reasonably large and continuous array of musical texts and manuals. Another major source of information is the huge corpus

of sculpture, painting and imaginative literature from different periods. This latter body of evidence reveals a great deal about the context in which music was made, its social cultural paraphernalia and its apparatus. Sculpture has many portrayals of musical instruments and sculptural history can project a picture of how they have changed over time. So can painting, which has, in addition, preserved pictures of music and dance concerts in a more vivid, realistic manner than sculpture. Literature is a still richer source. It provides us with insights into the role of music in general culture. It reflects details of the social, human, background into which music was integrated, presenting us with a lively idea of the diversity of musical practice, the varied functions of musical forms and the complexity of attitudes towards them. Literary works also contain helpful details concerning technical terms of music, since many poets and imaginative writers were men groomed in a many-sided culture, and well-grounded in the techniques of music.

The texts and manuals, however, remain the primary data. They are all that we have on music as such. Other evidence can be corroborative or augmentative, the texts are foundational. A student of musical history is perforce led to get as much out of them as he can.

The earliest textual material on music we have is the large though often scattered body of writings in Vedic literature. This material contains very interesting reflections on music and mirrors an ethos, echoes of which are present in our music culture to this day. But music in this literature is not an object of analytic and descriptive study.

We do not know when the study began to assume such a character. Perhaps at the time when the study of the Vedic language was emerging as a methodical science in the three *Vedāṅgas*: *Nirukta*, *Vyākaraṇa* and *Śikṣā*. Yāska's *Nirukta* goes back to the seventh century BC, Pāṇini's *Vyākaraṇa* is two or three centuries later, *Śikṣā* works are later still. The tradition of these *Vedāṅgas*, devoted to analysing language semantically, grammatically and phonetically, is older and goes back at least to

the eighth and ninth centuries BC.

The impetus for these *Vedāṅga* texts was provided by the need to conserve and understand *mantra*, the Vedic speech. *Sāma*, the Vedic song, was as sacred as the *mantra*. It is reasonable to suppose that the study of *sāma* music began at the same time as the *Vedāṅga*-studies devoted to *mantra*, and with a parallel intention. The earliest work of this nature that we have is, however, a relatively later work, the *Nāradi Śikṣā*, which like other works of the *Śikṣā* genre, belongs to the beginning of the Christian era and is not quite free from even later interpolations. But *Śikṣā*, as a branch of study, is as old as the other *Vedāṅgas*. A *Śikṣā*, when concerned with *mantra* was a phonetic study; devoted to *sāma*, it was a study of music. No other *Śikṣā* on *sāma*, besides the *Naradī*, survives.

The *Naradi Śikṣā*, along with the richer and more organised *Dattilam* and the *Nāṭya śāstra*, can perhaps be placed in roughly the same chronological bracket. Somewhat later, more scattered material is to be found in the small sections on music in the Jain canonic *Thāṇaṅga Sutta*² and the older *Purāṇa-s*.

These are all works antedating the *Bṛhaddeśi*, usually placed in the seventh century. With this work we come to a new group of texts, which, while borrowing the old conceptual framework and material, are yet devoted to newer interests and forms. This is a fairly large group; representative works being the *Bharata Bhāṣya*, the musical section in the *Mānasollāsa*, *Saṅgīta Cintāmaṇi*, *Saṅgīta-Samaya-Sāra* and, above all, the *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* (early 13th century AD).

With the thirteenth century there appears a lull in textual activity which begins anew with newer interests in the fifteenth century. Many old traditions continue, earlier material is still incorporated, but there is a sharp change in the conceptual framework, reflecting a major upheaval in music. Many old terms acquire a new content. Some new terms and concepts

² A translation and a study of the *Thāṇaṅga Sutta* forms a part of this collection of essays. See, 'Music in the *Thāṇaṅga Sutta*'.

become consequential. Also, now begins a division of the large material we have into Hindustani and Karnatic.

IV

The above brief, and even perhaps at places controversial, survey is meant to convey some idea of the range of material spread over time. A few words now concerning the character of this literature, what we can learn from it and what we cannot.

Texts from the *Nāradi Śikṣā* onwards contain a rich vocabulary for analysing and describing musical forms. But, as we have noted earlier, before, the *Bṛhaddeśi* there is no attempt at mapping structures precisely or, in other words, to notate them. In fact, it is in this text that we first meet with the syllables, *sa, ri ga ma*, as abbreviated signs for musical notes. *Dattilam*, written some centuries earlier, evinces great effort at brevity and some very ingenious formula-like descriptive devices. But the *sa, ri, ga, ma* syllables are not used. In this text, as in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* and the *Nāradi Śikṣā*, the name of a note is always fully spelt out: *ṣadja, ṛṣabha, gāndhara* and so forth. Abbreviations must have developed sometime after these texts, which were written in the first or second centuries AD and before the seventh century, the probable date of the *Bṛhaddeśi*.

Not only was a notation system not quite paid attention to,³ no method of measuring tones through string-lengths or a similar precise manner was developed. Musicians tuned by the ear, even as today. In fact, it is not till the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries that we find tones being given in string-lengths. This fact further compounds the difficulty of reaching at ancient forms with any exactitude.

The texts, it appears, were written and studied within a well-established *sampradāya*, a tradition of musical culture in which a

³ However, for a discussion as to why the notation system remained undeveloped, and the importance of notation in earlier Vedic music, see 'Reflections on the Logos of Music', the last essay in this collection especially pp. 315-316. The reader might also see the author's *Saṅgita Evaṁ Cintan*, Prabhat Prakashan, Delhi, 1994, Chapter 1.

basic knowledge of forms, a training of the ear, and a general understanding of the framework of music was already assumed in a student. Details about forms in ancient texts abound, but they only concern general features, individual details are left to the knowledgeable students to fill in.

The reason for this lies not only in the fact that these were advanced manuals, but also, evidently, in the forms themselves. The ancient *jāti*-s were *rāga*-like structures and have been proclaimed as the progenitors of *rāga*-s. Like the *rāga*-s, the *jāti*-s were forms which could only be described in their general formal features, through stating the principle of their structural formation, because they allowed room for free movement or improvisation. This freedom was extremely restricted and hedged round by numerous limits, because *jāti*-s were sacred structures, similar in this aspect to Vedic *sāma*. Every movement in them, like ritual action in the *yajña*, was determined through rules. Yet, unlike *sāma*, they did allow freedom. With them an entirely new element was introduced into Indian music: the nucleus for our *rāga*-s was born. *Jāti*-s gave rise to other forms in which the principles governing melodic movement were gradually loosened, modified, transformed, reduced in number and importance. It is this line of development to which *rāga*-s belong.

A study of ancient texts can, therefore, help us form a picture of how the principles of improvisation have changed over time and come to be what they are today. And here we have an example of the kind of history which the texts can help to formulate. In respect to exact form, however, the texts present a picture somewhat analogous to an archaeological site, revealing bare ground-plans or sometimes only clues to these, the rest of the structure being left to the imagination. We do, however, have the present forms, embodying many ancient principles of construction, to help the imagination.

Besides forms, music has a conceptual framework with multiple functions: analysing forms, describing them, commenting on them aesthetically, spiritually, metaphysically,

scientifically and in other ways in which we do talk about music and relate it to the rest of our experience. This framework itself has a history which reflects the history of forms themselves. Here the texts offer a rich fare to the historian of musicology, and the student of music in general.

The texts can also be instructive to us as practising musicologists. Today we have gained in being able to describe forms with greater quantitative accuracy. But we have lost much in the richness, width and penetration of analysis found in the best of the earlier text. Often when we grope for a suitable method of analysis or an appropriate category with which to classify and name a phenomenon, we find ourselves at a loss. A sensitive study of the earlier texts can be helpful here.

The texts can also have a clarifying role. Earlier I had spoken of quarrels over the 'purity' of *rāga*. An historical understanding of the character of *rāga*, as a form, will surely help us to see the issue in a clearer light and the fight over it will be less dogmatic.

Many musical terms such as *śruti*, *svara*, *mūrchanā*, *tāna*, *varṇa* among others, have been with us for centuries. Their meaning-content has been changing with change in music. But the constancy of the use of the terms themselves tends to create the false impression that meanings too, have remained unchanged. Consequently, layers of meaning, which have become mixed up, create confusion or bewilderment when we apply these terms today. A historical study of these terms, to use an archaeological analogy again, can help us separate various strata of meaning and perhaps dispel some confusion.

CHAPTER – SIX

Taṇḍu: The First Theoretician of Dance

Speaking of theoretical activity in India, we proudly single out the glories of Yāska (7th century BC), Pāṇini (6th–5th century BC) and their predecessors, who were the first thinkers in the world to subject language to a theoretical analysis, semantic and grammatical. We forget certain others who are equally ancient. One of them is Taṇḍu. Taṇḍu was the first theoretician in the world to analyse dance.

Taṇḍu wrote, or perhaps, like some ancient theoreticians, orally composed a *śāstra* on dance which has not come down to us in its original form. The *śāstra*, however, is incorporated in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and it is on this that we shall base our account of his endeavour. We shall be aided in this by the *Abhinava Bhārati*, the insightful commentary which the renowned Abhinavagupta wrote on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in the 10-11th centuries.

How old is Taṇḍu? There is no way we can give an answer. He is certainly older than Bharata, who used many existing *śāstras* including Taṇḍu's *śāstra* on *Tāṇḍava* to compile his own *Nāṭyaśāstra* around the beginning of the Christian era. Bharata presents Taṇḍu's *śāstra* in his own way, as he does many other of the *śāstras* that he uses. Yet we can reasonably expect a good many of Taṇḍu's own words to have been preserved in Bharata's reformulation, for this would only be natural in reproducing a tightly-knit technical work, such as a *śāstra* usually was.

But the *śāstra* as a whole has, however, suffered a distortion in Bharata's hands, as we shall attempt to show. Bharata has split it into two parts, assimilating one of them into his own text in such a manner as to almost obliterate its separate identity. We shall try to show how.

But we are more interested in Taṇḍu's approach to his material, the *Tāṇḍava*. As we have already pointed out, *śāstric* or

theoretical activity concerning the performing arts seem to have begun as early in India as theoretical activity concerning language. Pāṇini was familiar, with a *Naṭasūtra* which he ascribes to an *ācārya* named Śilālin. Nothing is known of this *sūtra* or of Śilālin beyond Pāṇini's reference to them. But the very fact that Śilālin's work is called a *sūtra* indicates that it was a systematic, organised enterprise. Did the word '*naṭa*' in the *Naṭasūtra* stand for a dancer or a play-actor? We have no way to know. Some have suggested that the '*naṭa*' here stands for a juggler. But that seems unlikely, since composing a *sūtra* was considered a serious activity. Juggling was certainly not a serious enough activity to call for a *sūtra* to be written on it. But if Śilālin's *Naṭasūtra* was either on dancing or playacting, it is surprising that Bharata seems unaware of it. Bharata has named many authorities who taught or wrote on the performing arts, yet nowhere does he mention Śilālin. Nevertheless, we must not forget that many old works have been genuinely forgotten. We know the authors of some through their mention by later theoreticians, who have, however, not mentioned everyone. *Śāstric* works are not histories, except incidentally, we would not have known of Śilālin and his *Naṭasūtra* except for Pāṇini's incidental mention of him.¹

Taṇḍu may have been as ancient as Śilālin, though we can never be sure. But we can be sure of the fact that his endeavour was connected with ancient Śaivism, which took the performing arts very seriously, creating forms that continue to live with us. In music it produced the *gāndharva*, which through transformations provided the basis for our *rāgas*. It also produced the *Gāndharva-śāstra*, which, likewise, remains the basic framework behind our theorising about *rāgas*.

Tāṇḍava was the dance counterpart of *gāndharva*. It was the dance Śiva himself created and danced. This, indeed, makes *Tāṇḍava* more central to Śaivism than *gāndharva*. *Gāndharva*

¹ It may be noted here, however, that the *Amarakośa* does list *śilālin* as a synonym of '*naṭa*' and '*bharata*', obviously meaning an 'actor'; See *Amarakośa*, *kāṇḍa* 2, *śloka* 12. See also *Bhāratiya Saṅgīta kā Itihāsa*, Thakur Jaidev Singh, Sangeet Research Academy, Calcutta, 1994, p. 280.

was not *created* by Śiva, nor performed by him, as *Tāṇḍava* was. It was only *addressed* to him.²

The story goes that Taṇḍu formulated his *śāstra* when Śiva asked him to teach the *Tāṇḍava* to Bharata. What Taṇḍu did was to create the first known theoretical analysis of dance as a form, which became a model for subsequent Indian enterprise in the field.

It is a model worth understanding on its own. For what Taṇḍu created can be characterised as one of the earliest systems for constructing, or generating complex forms out of simple entities through certain rules for transformation. What is extremely interesting is the fact — something which is pointedly brought out by Abhinava — that the simple units of which the dance was constituted as well as the complex whole they formed were self-contained entities. Unlike language on which Pāṇini theorised, the structure of Taṇḍu's dance did not refer to, or mean, anything beyond itself. The dance was form alone — a significant form, being beautiful, joy-giving and created by Śiva himself — but its significance was not acquired through any *meaning* outside itself such as language essentially has.

Thus from the view-point of theory, Taṇḍu's discourse upon dance is one of the earliest attempts at building what might be called a generative system of pure forms *without any content*. It should be of great interest to theorists who think that creating such systems is one of the supreme goals of theorising.

Taṇḍu's system can be likened to that of Pāṇini. Except that Pāṇini's system is not a system for generating pure forms. The complex linguistic whole which Pāṇini was interested in analysing was the *pada*, a usable unit in a sentence. Pāṇini broke up *padas* — Sanskrit *padas*, which were his concern — into smaller units.

² The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is, in truth, somewhat ambivalent in speaking of Śiva's creation of *Tāṇḍava*. In verse, 4, 13, Śiva says, "*mayāpidam smṛtam nrtyam*". Abhinava understands '*smṛtam*' to imply that the dance was without a beginning, ever-created: "*smṛtamityanāditvamasya darśayati*". Later in the chapter Bharata, however, says, "*sṛstvā bhagavatā datvāstāṇḍave*" — where Bharata speaks of the various parts and formations of *Tāṇḍava*, their creation by Śiva and then Śiva's teaching of them to Taṇḍu. (For this latter passage, see, 4, 259-260: all references are to be G.O.S. edition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.)

These units of *dhātu*, *pratyaya*, *upasarga*, were analytic in the sense that they were not usable on their own. But they were not units of pure structure. They were meaningful units. They could be variously combined by rules of formation which Pāṇini meticulously notes. Any number of *padas* could be generated by them, provided the rules were observed. But there was always an outside constraint. Whether a *pada* was acceptable or not depended on whether it had meaning or not.³ Taṇḍu's system, on the other hand, had no such constraint. It was not a system for *abhinaya*, which like language has to have a meaning outside itself. It was a system meant for generating pure dance which was form alone. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is aware of this central distinction and Bharata expresses it through an interesting story.

After Bharata had created the *nāṭya*, he presented a play before the Devas and the Asuras who enjoyed it immensely. The art, Bharata then thought, should be presented before Śiva — with the idea, perhaps, that Śiva was the ideal *sahridaya*, the quintessential discerning, sensitive critic. He approached Śiva with a play called the *Tripura-dāha*, a dramatised version of an episode from Śiva's own life. Śiva was pleased with Bharata's *nāṭya* and praised it. But he also asked Bharata to add something to it which it did not have. This was the *Tāṇḍava* dance, which Śiva himself was fond of dancing. But could this really be done? The very idea of adding a pure, non-representative form to *nāṭya*, which like language inherently depended on a world of meaning outside itself, raised an aesthetic problem. This was voiced by the Ṛṣis to whom Bharata related his story. The very soul of *nāṭya*, the Ṛṣis said, was *abhinaya*, which was a means for representing the happenings of the world on the stage; how could *Tāṇḍava* fit into such a representation, since it had no concern for meanings nor could it represent a happening. Bharata agreed

³ It may also very well be doubted whether Pāṇini intended to create a generative system, even though his analysis may be used for this end. Taṇḍu, however, clearly intended to design a generative system. For a more extended argument on this line, see my *Sāṅgīta Evaṃ Cintan*, Prabhat Prakashan, Delhi, 1994, Chapter I.

with the Ṛṣis. He was aware that *Tāṇḍava* was a pure, non-representational form. *Tāṇḍava*, he agreed, was quite unrelated to anything that happens in the world. It was, he said, beautiful in itself, a source of joy on its own, without depending on anything beyond itself.⁴ Yet he did incorporate, it into his *nāṭya*. We shall see how he did it. We shall discuss the principle he adopted to adapt the alien *Tāṇḍava* into the *nāṭya*. One thing which made this possible was Taṇḍu's analysis of *Tāṇḍava* into smaller units. The *Tāṇḍava* as a whole could not be incorporated into the *nāṭya*, but it was possible to incorporate its parts, using them to a different end.

The *Tāṇḍava* consisted basically of complex formations called *aṅgahāras* which could be strung together into larger wholes. The *Tāṇḍava* that Śiva danced had a repertoire of 32 *aṅgahāras*. Taṇḍu's goal as a *śāstrakāra* was to describe these *aṅgahāras*. The method he chose was to analyse them into smaller building-blocks. His analysis follows two stages. At the first stage, Taṇḍu analyses *aṅgahāras* into what he calls *karaṇas*. These are 108 in number. Different combinations of *karaṇas*, Taṇḍu says, produce different *aṅgahāras*. A combination of two *karaṇas* gives rise to what he terms *nṛtta-mātrkā*. Though obviously more complex than a *karaṇa*, the *nṛtta-mātrkā* is not yet an *aṅgahāra*. For the *aṅgahāra*, Bharata says, consists of two, three or four *nṛtta-mātrkās*. Bharata, however, goes on to say:

“Three *karaṇas* form *aṅgahāras* called *kalāpaka*; four of them form *śaṇḍakas* and combinations of five *karaṇas* are known as *saṅghātakas*. *Aṅgahāras* can also be formed by combining six, seven, eight or nine *karaṇas* together.”⁵

One thing is clear at this stage. Given a set of 108 *karaṇas*

⁴ *Ṛṣaya ūcuḥ* : yadā prāptyarthamarthānām tajñairabhinayaḥ kṛtaḥ/
kasmānṛttaṃ kṛtam hyetat kaṃ svabhāvamapekṣate/
na gitakārthasambaddham na cāpyarthasya bhāvakam/
Bharataḥ : artrocyaṭe na khalvartham kañcennṛttamapekṣate// kim tu
śobhām prajānayediti nṛttam pravartitam/ prāyeṇa
sarvalokasya nṛttamiṣṭam svabhāvataḥ//

Nāṭyaśāstra : 4, 261-264.

⁵ *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 4, 30-33. The translated portion comprises verses 32 and 33.

and the rule that a combination of three to nine of these could make an *aṅgahāra*, it is possible to produce innumerable more *aṅgahāras* than the 32 which Śiva's repertoire consisted of. The result of Taṇḍu's analysis was thus to enlarge the possibilities inherent within Śiva's dance. Taṇḍu uses the *karaṇas* (or so it appears from the text we have) only to describe 32 *aṅgahāras*, presumably those danced by Śiva and no more. But given his simple rule of forming *aṅgahāras* out of a combination of three to nine *karaṇas*, other *aṅgahāras* could easily be formed though he has not actually described them. Indeed, given the rule, his actual detailed descriptions of *aṅgahāras* seems quite unnecessary.

Later theorists were aware of the fact that Taṇḍu's formulation contains the possibilities of many more *aṅgahāras* than the 32 which Śiva employed in his dance. Performers made use of these possibilities in their own compositions. Abhinava, therefore, says that there is no end of *aṅgahāras* that can be performed, but the 32 danced by Śiva are especially sacred.⁶ Taṇḍu's *sāstra*, in effect, opened up the restricted *Tāṇḍava* of Śiva without diverging from it in form and conception. This is, remarkably, the character of many Indian *sāstras* including Pāṇini's grammar. Many would argue that Pāṇini has, indeed, been the central influence behind much Indian *sāstric* thought because his grammar became the model for other writers: his

⁶ "aṣṭottare karaṇaśate jñāte catuṣśaṣṭikaraṇayojanayā trutiṅgaritīyā yadyapyānantyamaṅgahārāṇām tathāpi prādhānyādadrṣṭaphalaṃ pratyādhikoparakatayā dvātriṅśannāmato nirḍiṣṭāḥ" — Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 4, 27. This may be translated as: "Once the 108 *karaṇas* are known, they can be combined to form endless *aṅgahāras* through the application of the 64 *yojanās* (the *yojanā* is not a part of Taṇḍu's vocabulary. It seems to refer to techniques and modes of putting *karaṇas* together employed by dancers during Abhinava's times) and the *atruṣṭitāṅga* method (another term not found in Taṇḍu). Yet only 32 *aṅgahāras* are of greater importance in the creation of *adrṣṭa* (the ritual effect that leads to *svarga*); therefore only these have been described by individual names."

For *yojanā* and the *atruṣṭitāṅga* method, see below. The word *atruṣṭitāṅgaritīyā* reads *trutiṅgaritīyā*, an obviously incorrect reading as will become evident later in the discussion.

fascinating analysis of language became the paradigm for other analyses. To me it seems more likely that Pāṇini's own exercise was not a cause but itself an outcome of a general cultural and intellectual approach — or one might call it 'style' — that delights in creating new forms out of a set of given units, varying, transforming and sometimes even transfiguring, certain basic patterns. Certainly, no historical links with Pāṇini can be traced in the various *sāstras* which are impregnated with the same intent of opening up latent possibilities.

A *karaṇa*, however, was itself a complex unit and quite obviously so. Even a simple glance at the description of *karaṇas* will not fail to impress this fact upon us. Taṇḍu, too defines a *karaṇa* as a 'combination of the movements of the hand and feet' — *hastapādasamāyogo nṛtyasya karaṇam bhavet* (4, 30). The words 'hand' and 'feet' here are — as Abhinava points out (see fn 10 on p. 6) — short-hand for the various limbs of the upper and the lower parts of the body; this is clear also from Taṇḍu's own description of the *karaṇas*, where a *karaṇa* is defined as a combination of the movements of the different parts of the upper and lower limbs of the body. I shall return to this below.

Let us take a couple of examples of *karaṇas*. The *karaṇa* named *maṇḍala-svastika* (the eighth in the list) is described as follows:

With the body in the still position (*sthāna*) called *maṇḍala*, bring the two hands to the *svastika* position in such a manner that they remain equipoised with the palms raised and facing inwards. Such is *maṇḍala-svastika*.⁷

The *karaṇa*, *katicchinna* (eleventh in the list) is:

The hands should have a *pallava* formation and placed near the head. The waist should be turned first to one side

⁷ *Svastikau tu karau kṛtvā prāṇmukhorḍhvatalau samau tathā ca maṇḍalaṃ sthānam maṇḍalasvastikam tu tat// Nāṭyaśāstra*, 4, 68-69. See also Abhinava's comments here. He also speaks of a *yojanā* in connection with this formation, though the word does not occur in the original. This was, evidently, an addition to the description made by Taṇḍu. The purpose apparently was to incorporate into the description certain techniques and modes of movement which had become parts of a dancers performance and which were thought to be important enough to figure in *sāstric* descriptions.

and then the other and this should be done repeatedly. Such is *kaṭicchinna*.⁸

Even these two examples, rather randomly chosen, are sufficient to reveal the complexity of the *karaṇas*. Each of them can be plainly analysed into smaller, more atomic, units. Such an analysis was, indeed, made by Taṇḍu; it is, in fact, assumed in his description of the *karaṇas*; mark his use of phrases like 'the *svastika* position' or 'the *pallava* formation', which are obviously *parts* of *karaṇas*. These smaller units are also named *mātrkā*s.

Taṇḍu introduces his description of the *karaṇas* with these words:

Listen to me, I shall now describe (the *karaṇas*) making a note of the movements of the hands, the feet, the hips, the thighs, the breast and the back. (I shall also describe) the *sthānas*, the *cāris* and the position and the movements of the hands needed in *nṛtta* (i.e. *Tāṇḍava*) known as the *mātrkā*s. Combinations of *mātrkā*s produce the *karaṇas*.⁹

Clearly, the *karaṇa* is a combination of many discrete positions and movements of the various parts of the body, and each of the *karaṇas* can be broken into these smaller 'units'. Indeed, as Taṇḍu unequivocally says, the *karaṇas* are nothing but assemblages of these smaller parts. The words '*sthāna*' and '*cāri*' are also worth noticing here. '*Sthāna*' stands for a stationary position and '*cāri*' for a movement. All dance, as Abhinava says, is stillness coupled with movement (*avasthānaṃ gatiśceti*). Thus every smaller part into which a *karaṇa* was analysed could itself be characterised in two distinct ways: still or moving. However, the term *mātrkā* which recurs here can cause confusion. Earlier, Taṇḍu had told us that a *mātrkā* was a much larger building block in the dance: two *karaṇas*,

⁸ *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 4, 71-72.

⁹ *hastapadapracāranu kaṭipārśvorusaṃyutam//
urahprsthodaropetaṃ vaksyamānaṃ nibodhata/
yāni sthānāni yāścāryo nṛttahastastathaiva ca//
sā mātrketi vijñeyā tadyogātkaraṇaṃ bhavet/*

Nāṭyaśāstra, 4, 58-60

he had said, made a *mātrkā*. Yet now he tells us that *mātrkas* are smaller units in the formation of the *karaṇas* themselves. No justification is provided for this puzzling use of the same term in two very different, palpably contradictory, senses: *Mātrkā*s cannot both form a *karaṇa* and be formed by them. Fortunately, we have Abhinava whose comments help us to sort out the confusion. *Mātrkā*s, Abhinava says, are of two sorts: (1) the *nṛtta-mātrkā* which was formed *through* *karaṇas* and (2) the *karaṇa-mātrkā*, the smallest units in a dance which *form* the *karaṇas*. The different uses of the term *mātrkā*, it would seem, indicates the two stages of Taṇḍu's analysis of the *aṅgahāras* that Śiva employed in his dance. At the first stage Taṇḍu analysed the *aṅgahāras* into *karaṇas*, asserting that these smaller building blocks could, through a simple rule of formation, give rise to *aṅgahāras*. But since the *karaṇa* is itself a complex figure, Taṇḍu in the second stage of his analysis breaks it into yet smaller building-blocks, which are not further analysable, and names these the *mātrkā*s. This appears reasonable enough, yet a confusion remains. Taṇḍu had said earlier that *two karaṇas* formed a *nṛtta-mātrkā*; he had not equated the *karaṇa* itself with a *nṛtta-mātrkā*. But if the *nṛtta-mātrkā* consists of two *karaṇas*, one fails to see how it can be an essential building-block in the formation of *aṅgahāras*. The *aṅgahāras* are *not* combinations of *pairs* of *karaṇas*. One fails, indeed to see the purpose in Taṇḍu's *śāstra* of the concept of *nṛtta-mātrkā*. Abhinava does try to give a justification, but it can hardly convince. He argues that only after *two karaṇas* have been shown to us is it possible to perceive the activity before us as part of a dance and not as part of another, an entirely different sort of activity.¹⁰ This raises the interesting

¹⁰ Abhinava's text here is obviously corrupt. Ramakrishna Kavi, the editor, has tried to repair it, and as in many such cases, with some success. The text reads: *karaṇadvayaprayogena ca vinivṛttābhimāno nāsti*, which Kavi emends to *karaṇadvayaprayogena ca vinivṛttanṛttābhimāno nāsti*. Abhinava goes on to say: *tataḥ paraṃ tu nṛtyatīyabhimānāka-ṛṇadvayaṃ nṛttamātrketyuktam*. This may be translated as: Even till two *karaṇas* are performed one does not understand it (*abhimāna*) as a dance; after that, however, the perception (*abhimāna*) is clearly that of a dance and this is the reason why a pair of *karaṇas* are called a *nṛtta-mātrkā*. (See Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4, 28-33).

question of when do we begin to identify an activity as that particular activity and not any other, but it clearly offers no cogent justification for considering the *nṛtta-mātrkā* as a building block in the formation of *aṅghāras*, a notion that Abhinava seems to entertain; he defines *nṛtta-mātrkā* as: *nṛttasyāṅghārātmano mātrkā utpattikaraṇam* (4, 28-33). It is the *karana* which can be really called the 'utpattikaraṇa', 'the generative material', of the *aṅghāra*, for the *aṅghāra*, as we have seen, was made up of sets of *karaṇas* — three to nine — and not of *pairs* of *karaṇas*. Moreover, a single *karaṇa* should on its own have been sufficient to convince anyone that what was happening was a dance: the examples described above are sufficient to impress this upon us. Abhinava like a loyal commentator was trying to justify the text of a *śāstrakāra* even though there was no justification. If we, too, want to be generous towards the *śāstrakāra* — as in all intellectual honesty we should be — a better justification, I think, would be to say that the text here is perhaps corrupt.

The term *nṛtta-mātrkā* is, then, redundant. It has no role in the *śāstra* properly speaking and can be replaced by the *karana*. *Mātrkā* should be taken to mean only what Abhinava calls, *karaṇa-mātrkā*, the smallest unit to which dance could be analysed.

How can we define the smallest unit in pure dance? Taṇḍu does not raise this question, which his analysis inevitably demands. Abhinava too does not raise it, but his definition of a *karaṇa* is very suggestive in this regard. A *karaṇa*, he says, is a movement. Of what, one might ask. It is, he replies, a movement of pure dance, of gracefully stirring one's limbs; moving them in an act which is not directed towards any utilitarian aim of getting something or of getting away from something. It is a movement, he continues, of the upper and lower parts of the body, made in such a way that it forms a coordinated whole (*saṅgatatayā* 'trūṭitatvena'). A movement of this kind when made from a previous position to another appropriate position, constitutes a single movement. And this is the *karaṇa* : *kriyā karaṇam, kasya*

*kriyā ? nṛttasya, gātrāṇām vilāsakṣepasya. heyopādeyaviśaya-kriyādibhyo vyatirikṭā yā tatkriyā karaṇamityartham ... tasyāḥ kriyāyāḥ svarūpamāha — 'hastapādasamāyogaḥ'. hastopalakṣitasya pūrvakāyā-vartīśākhāṅgopāṅgādeḥ pādopalakṣitasya cāparakāyāgatapār-śvakatyūrujaṅghācaraṇādeḥ saṅgatatayā 'trūṭitatvena vṛttijojane. pūrvakṣetrasamāyogatyāgena samucita-kṣetrāntaraprūtiparyantatayā ekā kriyā tatkaraṇamityarthāḥ. (Nāṭyaśāstra, Vol. I, GOS ed. p. 90). Abhinava adds that the concept of such a unit of a single movement exists in *loka* (ordinary behaviour of men and women), except that in dance the central thing is the grace and beauty of the movement and not its purposiveness. Obviously, this definition of a single unit in a dance is too large to form the smallest unit or *mātrkā*. But if we modify the definition to mean the single movement of a single limb, we can come much closer to what we want. Problems would still remain. What is a single limb? for example. On what grounds do we say that the movement is not the same but different, especially in the case of movements that might resemble each other. A related and more important question is: can we ever make a complete inventory of the units of smallest movements that the body can make and make with grace? And what is grace after all? There would have to be some arbitrariness in what would be called the unit of a movement — an arbitrariness, mitigated, however, by the limits of the *śāstra* itself: the *śāstra*, after all, is concerned with a specific form of dance, the *Tāṇḍava*, and not all non-representative dance in general. The *mātrkā*s of Taṇḍu, therefore, are a set of more or less definitely innumerable atomic units of movement in the *Tāṇḍava*: units that can be arrived at by analysing the *karaṇas*.*

However there is still a problem on which Abhinava does not seem to have pondered at all. *Tāṇḍava* is not only *gati* but also *avasthiti*, as Abhinava himself says. So our atomic units must comprise not only of units of movement — in terms of which Abhinava defines a *karaṇa* — but also units of stationary poses. These, perhaps, can be defined as the end result of a movement which can then be frozen into an *avasthiti*.

The outline of Taṇḍu's *sāstra* that we have had so far was based, as we said, on the fourth chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. We find Taṇḍu speaking of the *mātrkās*, but unlike the *karaṇas*, these are not described in detail, though their knowledge is assumed in the description of the *karaṇas*. The reason why it has been possible for Taṇḍu to describe complex formations such as *karaṇas* in single, short, succinct verses is that his description has a very technical tenor. And this comes from the fact that smaller movements comprising a *karaṇa* — namely the *mātrkās* — have been referred to through single epithets or short phrases with a precise but detailed meaning. Let us take examples from the two *karaṇas* we had described earlier. In describing *maṇḍala-svastika*, the text says (I quote from my translation earlier) :“with the body in the still position called *maṇḍala*...” The reference here is to a *sthānaka* (or *sthāna*) with the technical name *maṇḍala* the form of which is taken as understood through the term. The term is obviously what we would call a technical term. Further in the description of the same *karaṇa*, we find the description: “bring the two hands to the *svastika* position ...” *Svastika* is plainly another technical descriptive term, a shorthand for a more detailed description of a bodily position. Even a quick look will show that such technical terms are quite central to the description of the *karaṇas*. Like all technical terms they need to be explained and elaborated. And this is a necessary part of the function of any *sāstra*. The *sāstra* would be largely unintelligible without it. But the fourth chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which purportedly contains the entire description of the *Taṇḍava*, does not explain the technical terms it so profusely uses. Has Taṇḍu failed in his function as a *sāstrakāra*? His *sāstra* clearly appears to be essentially incomplete.

But this is not really the case. What has happened is that Bharata has taken Taṇḍu's description of the *mātrkās* out of its proper and appropriate place and removed it elsewhere using it for his own purposes. Taṇḍu's description now forms part of a larger, much more ambitious, repertory of the units of atomic movements and positions of the various parts of the body that

could be used in *nāṭya*, and is to be found in chapters eight to eleven of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, where technical terms like the ones named above have been explained. If we look at Abhinava's *tikā* on the *karaṇas* in chapter 4, we discover that he quotes relevant passages from chapters 8-10 in order to provide details and expound the terms used in Taṇḍu's description of the *karaṇas*. Clearly, matter which belonged to chapter 4 has been taken to these later chapters. Any number of examples can be given. But for our purposes here, the two terms noted above should be indicative enough. The *sthāna* termed *maṇḍala* is described among other *sthānas*, which also figure in the description of the *karaṇas*, at *Nāṭyaśāstra* 10, 65-66.¹¹ The *svastika* is described at 9, 186-187.¹²

Taṇḍu's *sāstra* must have contained a description of just those *mātrkās* which were needed for his *Taṇḍava*. Bharata has many more. What is even more distinctive is the fact that Bharata has appended a *viniyoga* — a *karma*, as Bharata calls it — after every individual *mātrkā* that he describes. The *karma* was of central importance for Bharata, for it tells of the use or uses to which a movement could be put in the context of *nāṭya*, which was Bharata's prime concern.

But it was also Bharata's way of incorporating the pure form of *Taṇḍava* into his own *abhinaya*-oriented *nāṭya*. For *abhinaya* can make use of any bodily movement whatsoever towards some representative end. It can impart a meaning to a movement or gesture within a *nāṭya* context even though the movement may not have a meaning in itself. One way of giving a movement a meaning can be through a convention by stipulating that a certain movement will refer to such a thing. Another is through its

¹¹ The *maṇḍala* was also known as *aindra*, 'related to Indra' and is described as follows:

*aindre tu maṇḍale pādāu catustālāntarasthitau//
tryasrau pakṣasthitau caiva kaṭijānū samau tathā*

¹² *caturasrasthitau hastau haṁsapakṣakṛtau tathā
tiryaksthitau cābhimukhau jñeyau talamukhāvīti
tāveva maṇibandhānte svastikākṛtisamsthitau
svastikāvīti vikhyātau ...*

semblance to *loka* that is, meaningful gestures found in ordinary behaviour.

‘There is no gesture or position of the hand which cannot be used meaningfully in the *abhinaya* of *nāṭya*’, says Bharata.¹³ What he says of the hand is true of any gesture whatever. Abhinava says this in a more discursive language in the beginning of chapter 9, where speaking of the *karma* or *vinīyoga* of various gestures he comments that *abhinaya* can be accomplished with gestures, in two distinct modes: the *lokadharmī* and the *nāṭyadharmī*. The *lokadharmī* are gestures taken from *loka*, the actual behaviour of men. The *nāṭyadharmī* is stylised. It uses the gestures of *nṛtta* in various ways to enhance the evocative power of *abhinaya*. It can consist of the use of *karāṇas* to create an atmosphere of grace and beauty especially in situations of love. It can employ those *nṛtta* gestures, which being similar to gestures in actual use, are suggestive of them, and it can even incorporate elements that mean nothing by giving them a meaning through a convention (*naṭasamaya*).¹⁴

At one place Bharata does make a distinction between gestures of *nāṭya* and of pure dance or *Tāṇḍava*. He does so in speaking of the gestures of the hands where he has a separate section for 64 kinds of *nṛtta-hastas*: see *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 9, verses following 10. The names of these *nṛtta-hastas* were obviously taken from Taṇḍu who uses them in his description of the *karāṇas*. For Bharata, however, these *nṛtta-hastas* were to be used in *abhinaya*. After naming them, Bharata says: “now listen

¹³ *nāsti kaścidahastastu nāṭye ‘rtho ‘bhinayaṁ prati*

Nāṭyaśāstra 9, 162.

¹⁴ *abhinayasya dvividhā itikartavyatā lokadharmī nāṭyadharmī ca ... nāṭyadharmasyāpi dvidhā - nāṭyopayogamūlabhūtakaiśīkisampādanocitalaukikaśobhāhetuḥ yathā - āveṣṭitādicaturvidhakarāṇarūpā. kācittvaṁśena lokamupajīvati, yathā-varṇātureṇa hastena tatra vyavahitena loka upajīvyate. loka hyanūrdeśyatāśeṣaṁ vastu nirdidiksuri drśaṁ tādrśamitthambhūtamityavasare prayuktameva caturaiḥ. evaṁ janāntikādaḥ vācyam. naṭasamayamātrurupā nāṭyadharmī samayasākīncitkarasya kalpane prayojanābhāvāt.*

Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 9, 1-3.

to their description and their *use* (in theatre) — *yathālakṣaṇame-teṣāṁ karmāṇi ca nibodhata*” (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 9, 17). And this is what he proceeds to do.

Despite the fact that Taṇḍu’s *karāṇa-mātrkās* have become mixed with extraneous material in Bharata’s repository of gestures and positions, it is yet, I think, possible to sift and segregate them on the basis of their names. Bharata has not changed the names given to them by Taṇḍu.

It is not our aim here to attempt such a sifting, though anyone who desires to detach Taṇḍu’s *śāstra* from its *Nāṭyaśāstra* context must undertake this exercise. But what would be more interesting in getting to know Taṇḍu as a *śāstri* would be to ask the question: how did he relate the *karāṇa mātrkās* to the *karāṇas*? Did he formulate any set of rules by which *mātrkas* could be combined to form the *karāṇas*? We do not know. But clearly a rule as simple as one he has for combining *karāṇas* into an *aṅgahāra* would not have done in this case. It does not work even in the case of *aṅgahāras* if Taṇḍu’s purpose was to *deduce* only the 32 *aṅgahāras* which Śiva danced from his set of 108 *karāṇas*. Indeed, it is difficult to see how *any* set of general rules for putting the *mātrkās* together can be formulated which will yield just the needed 108 *karāṇas*, no more and no less.

The only rule, or rather principle, which Taṇḍu does voice is that every *karāṇa* had at least two distinct sets of *mātrkās*:

- (1) those consisting of hand movements and positions and
- (2) those consisting of the movements and positions of the feet (or perhaps the lower position of the body as a whole); for he defines *karāṇa* as *hastapādasamāyogah*.¹⁵ Further, in initiating his description of the *karāṇas*, he says, before listing them, “I shall describe how the *hasta* and the *pāda* are to be formed in them (that is, in the *karāṇas*) — *eteṣāmeva vakṣyāmi hastapādavikalpanam*” (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 4, 34). But plainly this is not enough, for if this were the only rule to be followed we will

¹⁵ *hastapādasamayogo nṛtyasya karāṇaṁ bhavet.*

Nāṭyaśāstra 4, 30.

have innumerable more than 108 *karaṇas*.

Abhinava, indeed observes that since a *karaṇa* is a combination of a set of bodily movements, (*gati*) and positions (*sthiti*), there is really speaking no limit to the number of *karaṇas* that can be formed. What Taṇḍu wanted was to limit the number of such possible formations. It is for this reason, Abhinava adds, that Taṇḍu has listed certain *specific* movements and positions for the purpose of *karaṇa*-formation.¹⁶ Yet it is obvious that even the *specific* movements and positions which Taṇḍu lists can give rise to an infinity of combinations. Taṇḍu does not seem to have devoted attention to building a system by which the combination of the atomic *karaṇa* - *mātrkā*s could be limited to the formation of only a favoured set of figures. His *karaṇa*-*mātrkā*s aimed only at providing a list of movements and positions into which his 108 *karaṇas* could be conveniently broken down.

In explaining Taṇḍu's *sāstra* Abhinava uses certain concept which are not to be found in Taṇḍu himself. Two such concepts stand out: the concepts of *yojanā* (See fn. 7) and of *vartanā*. Abhinava obviously considered these to be important concepts since they are central to his descriptions of the *karaṇas*. Every *karaṇa*, as we have seen, consisted of a number of movements and positions, the *karaṇa*-*mātrkā*s. The *karaṇa* was a whole built out of these smaller building-blocks. It was, obviously, not a mere juxtaposition of these smaller movements, but a graceful arrangement of them. This called for *yojanā*, an appropriate putting-together or 'arranging', and *vartanā* a proper *manner* in which to do this. (A parallel can be found for *vartanā* in the word *barat* of a *rāga*, that is, the 'right' way of moving over the notes in it). Both these terms clearly have an aesthetic intent. *Yojanā* and *vartanā* aimed at associating the different positions and movements of the different limbs — namely, the various *mātrkā*s of the upper and the lower parts of the body — in such a

¹⁶ *tena gatisthitissammilitam karaṇamityānantyaṃ yadyapi karaṇānām taṭhāpyāṅgahāro-payogivādetavaduktamiti ślokaśya tātparyam*. Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4, 59-60. 4, 59-60, which occasions this observation; it has been translated earlier by us: see fn 9.

way that the whole had a smooth fit, with nothing hanging loose or disjointed (*saṅgatatayā'truṭitatvena vṛttiyojane*, as Abhinava puts it; 'vṛtti' here is a synonym of *vartanā*). Yet these were not purely aesthetic terms. They also had a descriptive content. Abhinava *describes* the *yojanā* and *vartanā* for almost all the 108 *karaṇas*. He also speaks of the proper *vartanā* for moving into one *karaṇa* from another, adding that these are matters which the practising dance *ācāryas* are conversant with.¹⁷ They appear indeed to be matters more intimately connected with *prayoga* than *sāstra*.

Yet *yojanā* and *vartanā* seemed to have entered organised *sāstric* discourse, much before Abhinava, who was not *introducing* these terms but using them in a manner that assumes their currency in organised discourse. Thus he speaks of *karaṇa*-*yojanās* as sixty four in number.¹⁸

The *yojanās*, evidently, formed a organised scheme. We do not know how the scheme was articulated in discourse. But here, certainly, was a possibility of formulating a system by which the *mātrkā*s could be associated through a set of rules. There is no way to tell if the possibility was actualised. From the post-Taṇḍu

¹⁷ Commenting on the first *karaṇa*, the *talapuṣpapuṣam*, he says: *yadā tu karaṇāntarasanniveśanantaramidaṃ karaṇam prayujyate tadā tyaktavyatadiyahastapādāpekṣayā ādatavyakaraṇagatahastapādādyapekṣayā ca yathā vartanākrameṇa svayameva tyagopādāne atruṭitatayā vā sampadyate tathā kartavyamityalaṃ nṛttācāryagopita (ryopayogi) nā'nena etacca yathāvasaram darśayitvā sarvaṃ nirūpayiṣyāmaḥ*.

Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4, 60-62. This may be translated: "When this *karaṇa* is formed after the formation of another *karaṇa*, then the transition between the *hastā* and *pāda* gestures of the earlier *karaṇa* to those of the present one is to be made through such a series of *vartanās* that the whole process of giving up the earlier *karaṇa* and taking up the new one should be spontaneous or smooth (*svayameva tyāgopādāne atruṭitatayā vā sampadyate*); but these are practical matters more relevant for *ācāryas* of dance and we need not go into them. In any case I shall speak of them at the right place." The reading *nṛttācāryagopita*..., changed to *nṛttācā(ryopayogi)* by Ramakrishna Kavi, suggests another meaning: "...but these are matters which the *ācāryas* wish to keep secret, and we need not go into them..."

¹⁸ See Abhinava on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4, 19-27.

texts on dance that we have, it is evident that it was the notion of *vartanā* that was given more attention than that of *yojanā*. Kallinātha commenting on the dance section of the *Saṅgītaratnākara*, where *vartanā* is an important concept (See Kallinātha on *Saṅgītaratnākara* 7, 348-349) speaks of an earlier text ascribed to Kohala where 24 *vartanās* have been described. He quotes the entire section concerned with these *vartanās* from this text. This text in fact states that the 24 *vartanās* were described by Taṇḍu himself.¹⁹ Two of the *vartanās* are however, ascribed to *ācārya* Kīrtidhara, who may have been one of the first *ācāryas* to have articulated the concept of *vartanā* in the *śāstra*.

The *tāṇḍava* grew also as an art in later times. Later theorists speak of *mātrkās* both of *sthiti* and *gati*, i.e. of both the *sthānaka* and the *cārī* kinds, which were not part of Taṇḍu's scheme. Clearly, the *tāṇḍava* was flexible not only *within* the system of *karāṇa* and *mātrkās* formulated by Taṇḍu on the basis of Śiva's *aṅghāras*, but could also borrow and adopt new movements and gestures without losing its central character. The new *sthānakas* and *cārīs* were called *deśī*. The process of ever new *deśī* formations is in principle an endless process. There is no reason why it should stop, though it seems to have done so at present.

¹⁹ *caturviṃśatirityuktā vartanā bhāṭṭatanḍunā* — the *Kalānidhi* of Kallinātha on *Saṅgītaratnākara* 7, 348-349.

CHAPTER – SEVEN

Improvisation in Indian Music*

When an Indian musician sings or plays he does not “improvise”, at least not in the sense in which the word “improvisation” is commonly used in Western musical terminology. His aim is to build the structural character of a particular modal form which is called a *rāga*. In this elaboration his “improvisation” does not merely consist in the technical development of a “theme” which can neither contain the extensible quality of a *rāga*, nor could it ever have the many-sided potentiality inherent in the structure of a *rāga*. In fact, varied “themes” with many improvisations can be introduced in a *rāga*, each one of them with the intention of revealing different facets of the *rāga*. Confusion will, indeed, arise if a *rāga* is equated with a theme.

A *rāga* holds in itself elements that are fixed as well as those that are malleable; in its elaboration neither of them can be ignored. One of the mysteries of a fertile and unbroken tradition is that in it contraries are reconciled. Nothing in it can be overtly stated as rigidly fixed, and yet its archetypal forms, which continue over the ages to be the source of inspiration and of creative expression, remain inviolable. A *rāga*, in its final description, is, perhaps, such an archetypal musical form.¹

The scale of a *rāga*, its particular ascent and descent, the significant notes and phrases which highlight its distinctive form, the process of its unfoldment or elaboration are handed down to a musician by his teacher. He also learns the basic patterns and the ways of attacking notes or phrases in a particular *rāga*, the

* Written in Co-authorship with Shri Vivek Dutt.

¹ A *rāga* is perhaps closer to an idea or a concept, and not an archetype, since new *rāgas* can be created and old *rāgas* can undergo crucial changes. For a development of *this* thought or idea see my *Saṅgit Evam Cintan* (Hindi), Prabhat Prakashan, New Delhi, 1994.