
Philosophical Foundations of Indian Music

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Abstract: In Indian philosophical tradition, the word *sabda* (sound) has many levels of meaning. The technical meaning of *sabda*, apart from its ordinary meaning of just 'sound', is that one of the four *pramanas* (*pratyaksha*, *anumana*, *upamana*, and *sabda*). The concept of *sabda* however reveals more through going parallels between the two traditions. *Sabda* is *brahman*; *sabda* is with *brahman* from the beginning; without the *sabda* nothing at all can come into existence. The synthesis of art, literature, science, mythology, religion and philosophy the history of Indian music can be traced back several millennia and has been discussed in Sanskrit theoretical treatises for around two thousand years. Thus the historical background of Indian music is highly relevant in the context of this study for the proper understanding of its features and philosophical ideas relating to it. Like all the other Indian classical performing arts, classical music too is a journey of the *jeevatma* towards the *paramatma* or the divine. Indian music represents the emotions of the soul in the presence of nature. The origin of Indian music is said to be rooted in the Vedas. It is said that God himself is musical sound.

Keywords: Art, emotion, Indian music, Philosophy of music, Samaveda

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian classical music is one of the oldest forms of music in the world dates back to nearly two thousand years and unique in that, it is highly spiritual in nature. It is impossible to divorce Indian music from the whole structure of Indian culture and philosophy with which it is interwoven in a number of ways from the earliest time of which we have recorded. It is the synthesis of art, literature, science, mythology, religion and philosophy. The historical background of Indian music is highly relevant in the context of this study for the proper understanding of its features and philosophical ideas relating to it. Like all the other Indian classical performing arts, classical music too is a journey of the individual soul (*jeevatma*) towards the divine (*paramatma*). Indian music represents the emotions of the soul in the presence of nature. The origin of Indian music is said to be rooted in the *samavedas*. It is said that God himself is musical sound. The philosophy of Indian classical music took its origin from the concept of *nadabrahman*, the sound which pervades the whole universe. The origin of Indian music is therefore considered as divine in nature. It is said that the musicians has to cultivate an attitude of self embodiment, in order to fuse with the supreme reality, *brahma*. *Brahma* is said to be the author of the four Vedas, of which the *Samaveda* was chanted in musical pattern. The essential spirit of Indian music is well preserved as it has been perpetuated through the ages. The performers of Indian music have always approached their art with simplicity and reverence. Indian spirituality penetrates the aesthetic value and transforms them into religious values. Raga is the pivotal concept of Indian music uniquely melody based and is a fine example of absolute music. The emotional quality of the raga is known as the quality of that emotion. Raga and flavor (*rasa*) go hand in hand in Indian classical music.

2. NADABRAHMAN THE SOUND AS BRAHMAN

In Indian philosophy sound has many levels of meaning. The philosophy of the Indian classical music took its origin from the concept of *nadabrahman*. In the Indian philosophical concept of *nadabrahma*, music or *nada* is perceived as the manifestation of the *brahman*. The *nadabrahman* or the ultimate and transcendental sound is the seed from which the entire creation has evolved. Indian philosophy, the most primal reality of sound is actually sound of God or God as sound, the form of the formless. And this is where *AUM* comes in. It symbolizes the sound of *nadabrahman*. That is why *AUM* is considered to be the great *mantra*; it is the sound of God manifesting. God's manifesting symbol is the word of glory *AUM*. The secret syllable *AUM* embodies the essence of the universe. Sound or *nada* is believed to be the heart of the process of creation. It is the source of the whole world. This means that the whole universe was created from the energy of sound. It is only the sound that exists in the beginning. Through the vibratory power of the *AUM*, God created and sustains the entire universe. Music is closely associated with religion and philosophy. At first it was inextricably interwoven with the ritualistic and devotional side of religious life. According to Indian philosophy, the ultimate goal of human existence is liberation (*moksa*), of the soul (*atman*) from

the life cycle or spiritual enlightenment; and *nadopasana* is taught as an important means for teaching this goal. *Nadopasana* or worship of that one universal power through music is the final aim of the musician or singer. *Nada* gives rise to *shruti*, which in turn given rise to notes. It is these notes that give rise to various ragas of Indian music. *Yatho Nada Tatho Shruti, Yatho Shruti Tatho Swara, Yatho Swara Tatho Raga, Yatho Raga Tatho Geeta, Yatho Geeta Tatho Atma, Yatho Atma Tatho Nadabrahma*. This Means: Where the sound goes, there the *shruti* should follow. Where the *shruti* are, there the notes should follow. Where the notes are, there the raga should be brought out. Where the raga is, there the music should follow. Where the music is, there the soul should be follow. Where the soul is, there the God will be experienced. The concept of *nadopasana* means worship through music. It is considered as a path to spiritual salvation. In the case of *nadabrahma*, music is the manifestation of God, whilst in that of *nadopasana*, music is the medium of worshipping God.

3. PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN SAMAVEDIC MUSIC

Vedas are the most important philosophical scriptures considered the Indian philosophy and classical music and a rich store house of knowledge. The recital and chant of *mantras* has been an essential element of *Vedic* rituals throughout the centuries. *Veda mantras* have to be chanted in a specified cadence and rhythm. *Vedic* chanting puts the listener directly in touch with the universal source of energy. The very listening to the *Vedic* chanting creates a tremendous beneficial effect on one's mental and bodily health. More important, by connecting us to a higher level of consciousness, they provide us a harmony of mind, body and soul. The *Gayatri mantra* is a prayer to that one illuminating source to nourish all our faculties. This source, powers the intellect, which controls the mind, when in turn controls the senses, which are ultimately canalized us to think rightly. *Gayatri mantra* is a highly revered *mantra* of the *Vedic* tradition. The most interesting aspect of the *mantra* is that it is considered to be not different from the divine entity that forms the content of the *mantra*. It is in the sense of *Gayatri mantra* as an object of worship that the music is personified into Goddess. The *Gayatri mantra* is repeated and cited widely in *Vedic* literature. *Samaveda mantra* contains in it the deep meaning of music. *Samaveda* is the foundation for all systems of music. It is more complex and creative artistic and appealing way of remembering the thousands of *mantras* in the *Vedas*. The *Samaveda* is perhaps one of the oldest records of man's quest for mysticism and music. *Samaveda* is the *Veda* of *samans* or chants originate from the word *saman*. The etymological meaning of *sama* is that which destroys sorrow by its sweetness of song. It naturally incorporates music, *mantra*, linguistics and above all, a reflection of the world view of saint. The music of *Samaveda* is commonly known as *Samagana*. The significant use of meters and rhythm in the music of those times is worth mentioning. In *Samaveda* odd and even meters and *laya* were used as they are used today. It is through *Samaveda* that the ancient liturgical world of music has come up formal system of music. At the same time, the music of India reflects the fundamentals of Indian philosophy. For example, the original five ragas bear the significance of *Panchabhoothas* (five elements) they are:- *Sree* raga for *Kshiti* (Earth), *Vasantha* raga for *Ap* (Water), *Bhairavi* raga for *Teja* (Light), *Panchama* raga for *Marut* (Breeze), *Megha* raga for *Vyoma* (Space). It clears that how the divine and celestial raga specimens came on earth with the help of *Panchabhoothas*.

4. THREE PILLARS OF INDIAN MUSIC-PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

Music is both art and science, art in the sense that it deals with the expression of one's feelings and emotions through sound, in melody and harmony, may be through its composition and execution. The essence of music thus consists in carrying the entire mankind into a feeling of oneness, an identity which unifies the musician, the listeners and the music which is created. Music is a science in the sense it is concerned with the systematic management of sound at all levels in the universe. In the study of Indian music, it is clear that the three main pillars of Indian music are melody, rhythm and raga, the first referring to the melody of sound; the second is the basic tune pattern of music and third is the rhythmic pattern followed in rendering the music.

5. MELODY

Melody is taken to be the most important component of Indian music. The ancient Indian music was actuated by its desire to explore its mystery and tended to proceed from its surface to its centre. This is amply suggested by its tonal movements a still prevalent and mainly melodic in nature. Hence the music of the folk and tribes, of religious and sacramental chant and classical art music have the common quality of being based on melody. Melody is also a flow of sound, but this flow of sound when subjected to certain rules becomes raga a musical language. Common

element in all forms of music is melody. Melody is the only element common to music of all times and all races and is the corner stone and touch stone of artistic quality. The musicians defined the term in general as succession of single notes which make musical sense. Encyclopedia of Britannica describes melody as a surface of music whether it is in an inner part or on the top. Melody is horizontal resolution of harmony, it is a succession of single tones; making a design in pitch and rhythm to produce a satisfying musical effect, in which motive phrase and period are formed by the combination in proper relationship of movement and sound. The homogeneity of a melody is based differently with Indian and Western music. Within Indian melody, the salient notes are fixed by long associates but in West, the notes are made such by the momentary impulse of the harmony or counterpoint. The notes of Indian melodies must be in an assigned mode or tune or time; the notes in West, if they are to be strong, have a firm diatonic and rhythmic basis. An Indian melody will use the conjunct moves ninety percent of time and balance will be the disjunctive motions. The typical forms of ascent and descent tend to differ in the same raga. Indian music is very strict about the observance of this type; its origin probably lies in the tendency to choose between two consonant notes which is the note of the passage next to the one which is being passed over. One of which basic axioms of melody is that it can perfect itself and maintain its chastity only by taking ample and constant care of its tonal dynamism and architecture because melody is nothing but tonal movement in a field of tonal order. A melody is being constituted not by any of its notes individually but by the composite pattern of all its note intervals in their totality.

6. RAGA AND NAVARASA- PHILOSOPHICAL RELATION

The heart of the rich tradition of the classical Indian music is raga. The primary philosophy of the correct interpretation of the raga is to develop a deep sense of self realization for the teacher and pupil, the performer and listener alike. This communion evolves from a complex theoretical concept of time and season unique to each raga. The raga is definite, scientific, aesthetic, melodic form made up of a series of notes within the octave, each one different from every other and distinguished by its own particular sequence of notes, number of tones, ascending and descending orders, most prominent notes, notes of different lengths, characteristic phases and principal mood. If raga is the melodic core of Indian music, rasa is its basic aesthetic appeal which enriches the raga in the domain of art, and infuses life into music. A proper assimilation of a raga with its inherent flavor (*rasa*) is highly intuitive and no amount of logical or grammatical calculation can establish the authenticity of such assimilation. There can be no raga without an accompanying flavor (*rasa*). This is perhaps the unique feature of Indian music which cannot be found in any other musical heritage. For every raga in Indian music, there is some emotional core content in man's innermost feeling, the depth of which he alone can realize. These factors are: expressions detachment and eternity. It is said that Bharatha admits flavor (*rasas*) to be basic which are *sringara* (love), *raudra* (anger), *vira* (enthusiasm) and *bibhalsa* (disgust). There are four other flavors (*rasas*) which are dependent on or derived from these fundamental flavors (*rasas*). The derived flavors (*rasas*) are: *hasya* (mirth), *karuna* (grief), *albudha* (wonder) and *bhayanaka* (terror). According to some, there is a ninth one called *santa rasa*, which is the highest of all flavors (*rasas*) in the sense that at this stage man reaches his identification with a self luminous spiritual joy where all other flavor (*rasas*) coincide in a transformed and transmuted form. Each artistic creation is supposed to be dominated by one of these nine sentiments, although it can also express related emotions in a less prominent way. The more closely the notes of a raga conform to the expression of one single idea or an emotion, the more overwhelming the effect of the raga. In standard literature on musicology we come across a total of nine flavors (*rasas*). They are:- (i) *sringara* or love (ii) *karuna* or grief (iii) *raudra* or anger (iv) *vira* or enthusiasm (v) *bibhalsa* or disgust (vi) *hasya* or mirth (vii) *albudha* or wonder (viii) *bhayanaka* or terror and (ix) *santa* or peace. In elaborating the details of the list of flavors (*rasas*), we have to point out that each has its empirical counterpart which should not be emphasized when considered at the aesthetic level. The flavors (*rasas*) the artistic experiences have been always interpreted from a trans-empirical point of view. Indian music is the relationship between raga and flavor. It is normally accepted that the raga is something more than its mere melodic pattern or the melodic microcosm; it has something more than its zonal structure which is, as it were, its body. The soul of the raga is flavor (*rasa*), the indwelling spirit. The matter is and should be life, as we have already indicated, to the verdict of intuition based on deep meditation. It is now perhaps clear that each raga in Indian music is associated with a definite flavor (*rasa*). In other words, ragas are understood as the musical vehicle to convey a specific aesthetic cum emotional sentiment, characteristic of flavor (*rasa*), its definite ethos, and its spiritual and trans-empirical appeal. It is thus, the emotive aesthetic

principle, the indwelling or presiding sentiment which the musician tries to invoke with the help of a unique combination of notes, customarily called the raga. The main factor constitutive of the foundation of Indian music and appears to be the close and intimate relation between a raga and its inherent flavor (*rasa*). A flavor (*rasa*) is incarnated in a raga which depends on a vocabulary of musical notes each signifying a particular flavor (*rasa*). A raga consisting of seven notes would signify seven flavors (*rasas*), and a raga consisting of six notes would signify six flavors (*rasas*) and so on. The flavors (*rasas*) are usually associated with *svaras*. The notes 'Sa' and 'Ri' are both appropriate for the flavors (*rasas*) of heroism, wonder and resentment; the note 'Da' is suitable for the flavors (*rasas*) of disgust and terror; the notes 'Ga' and 'Ni' are suitable for the flavor (*rasa*) of grief or sorrow and the notes 'Ma' and 'Pa' are said to be appropriate for the flavors (*rasas*) of humor and love respectively. *Sa* and *Ri- Vira*, *Raudra* and *Albhudha*, *Ga- Karuna*, *Ma- Hasya*, *Pa- Sringara*, *Da- Bibhalsa*, *Bhayanaka*, *Ni- Karuna*. It reads: *hasya* and *sringara rasas* are to be applied respectively through 'Ma' and 'Pa' *vira*, *raudra* and *albhudha* flavor (*rasas*) are to be manifested through the application of 'Sa' and 'Ri' *karuna* flavor (*rasa*) to be revealed through 'Ga' and 'Ni' and *bibhalsa* and *bhayanaka* flavor (*rasas*) are to be expressed through 'Da.'

7. RHYTHM

The word rhythm (*tala*) is derived from the *tali* and is customarily accepted as a spontaneous expression of joy and cheerfulness. Centuries and centuries ago, rhythm was discussed by ancient musicologists who were saint musicians and their observations were recorded in various scriptures of antiquity. Rhythm is the most fundamental element in any form of music. It is the movement generated and also regulated by measured application of beats with the help of any suitable percussion instrument. It is also the creative and generative impulse in the very heart of the musician. Rhythm is spontaneous in any music, and the musician in performing music may unconsciously follow any particular rhythm which is suitable for his own creation in performing music. Rhythm is a technical word customarily meaning a series of sounds which are produced on a percussion instrument covered by any animal skin with the help of striking by the palm. Rhythm has a couple of functions: (a) to accompany music or dance, and (b) to express its own rhythmic embellishment independent of any melody or dance. Music without rhythm may be roughly compared to cooked food without salt. Thus rhythm may be said to contribute beauty, grace and cadence to music. In fact rhythm goes together and one is insignificant with the other. Each rhythm is composed according to various sentiments of human mind towards musical realization. All these together contribute to the rhythm which is the main switch gear of a rhythm. The rhythm helps the musician to improvise a vast network of complicated pattern of permissible notes which can be suitably expressed by a parallel complicated network permissible within the framework of a specific rhythm. The rhythm in Indian music has a circular dimension; where as in Western music it has a linear dimension. In Western music, rhythm is not as complicated as it is in Indian music, because the former mostly follows a free rhythm of a uniform division of two beats or three beats.

8. CONCLUSION

The philosophical foundations of Indian music rest upon the solid rock of the realization of the immortal soul of music. Therefore, we should be educated to know that soul of music, because proper training and education can only harmonize the chords of the phenomenal music with those of the transcendental grand music of man. The artists as well as the art of music should, therefore, be raised upon the high level of spirituality, and they should be conscious of the grand truth of philosophy of India that man can see god face to face, can get an immediate awareness of the absolute, as the task of philosophy of India is to solve the riddle of the universe and to discover the ways and means to man's perfection in life. The music of India is one of the oldest unbroken musical traditions in the world. The origin of Indian classical music goes back to the *Vedic* time when the saints, deep in meditation would contemplate different sound vibrations and tonal pattern and the effects it has on consciousness. Music in India was not a matter of sensuous enjoyment or a luxury to be enjoyed by the rulers and certainly not to amuse oneself but had a deeper meaning and objective. Indian musicians expressed philosophical and religious concepts through musical performance or composition. They emphasized on bringing the God, considered as the source of knowledge, power and wisdom nearer to us by working along the beauty aspects of the God. Man is considered as miniature of God with divine attributes. Man realizes the three value system of *satyam*, *sivam*, *sundaram* through *sraavana* or education, *manana* or experience and *sadana* or practice. Thus in India philosophy and music goes hand in hand. Indian music has managed to overcome all the external influences and also has managed to retain the

effervescence of value system. Indian music distinguished itself from the music of other parts in the world through its unique aesthetic understanding, its immediate association with religious thought, and it's all pervading spirituality. Indian music has grown into a full bloom lotus which, still today continues in its own glory emanating its ineffable ethos triumphantly conquering thousand of millions of souls in all corners of the world.

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