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## MUSIC AND SOCIETY

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In India, music is believed to be as eternal as God. Before the creation of the world —it existed as the all-pervading sound of "Om" —ringing through space. Brahma, the Creator, revealed the four Vedas, the last of which was the Sama Veda —dealing with music.

Vedic hymns were ritualistic chants of invocation to different nature gods. It is not strange therefore to find the beginnings of Hindu music associated with Gods and Goddesses. The mythological heaven of Indra, God of Rain, was inhabited by Gandharvas (singers), Apsaras (female dancers) and Kinnaras (instrumentalists). Saraswati, Goddess of Music and Learning, is represented as seated on a white lotus playing on the Veena. The great sage Narada first brought the art to earth and taught it to men.

As late as the sixth century or thereabout, a sage, Bharata, was supposed to have received a revelation direct from Brahma who "entered into meditation and out of the depths of Divine Thought brought forth the Natya Sastra (science of dancing) for the joy of the Universe." Bharata preserved this knowledge in a detailed exposition of the theory of Hindu music and dancing.

Music and religion were so intertwined with each other in the Vedic Age that the general term "Margi" (Destroyer of Births) was applied to the musical system then in use. Discipline of emotion and the creation of a state of meditative consciousness were the chief function of ancient Aryan music. The sublime state of consciousness was to be realized in the following manner:—"Music brings on a sudden concentration of the mind and directs it toward a given object. The music having concentrated the mind, and the words 'O God you are endless' used by the operator, constantly directing him toward God, is sure to bring on the salvation of the soul."

It is said that Krishna once addressed

Narada:

—"O, Narada!

I live not in Vaikuntha (heaven)

Nor in the hearts of Yogis,

Nor even in the region of the sun,

But I stand there

Where my Bhakthas (devotees) sing."

### POPULAR MUSIC ORIGINATES

The great restriction placed upon the practice of music in ancient India brought about a desire for a more pleasurable style suited to general taste. It was then that the style known as Desi or "that which pleases the people" was created. While Margi music was Recitative and Nibadha (set in



and bound by words), Desi music was lyrical and Anibadha (free from words). This was probably the beginning of Alap or improvisation on a given melody.

Musical sounds were conceived by Hindus to be twenty-two within the octave, and were called srutis. From these twenty-two srutis were extracted melodies, and the tones selected for a particular melody were called swaras for the time being. Certain swaras in the octave were recognized as pure or shudha swaras and formed a scale of seven notes designated as: *sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni*.

The melodies derived from the twenty-two srutis came to be known as Ragas. The word Raga means "Colour" or "Temperament" which may be explained as "colour of the mind" or the "power to move the heart." Definite rules pertaining to the prominence of certain notes and phrases, their sequence and the proper intonation in the singing of these Ragas, gave them their character. There was also a very definite season and hour of the day, assigned for their auspicious performance.

Historically there were in the beginning only six Rags, which are today known as: Bhairav, Hindola, Megh, Shri, Dipak and Malkaus. The first five Rags were supposed to have emanated from the five faces of Shiva, and the last one from Parvati, consort of Shiva. These Rags were associated with different seasons and were visualized in the form of paintings. Bhairav is dedicated to Shiva, the three-eyed Sage seated on the crest of the Himalayas, with the crescent moon on His forehead, His head and arms encircled with serpents, and wearing a necklace of skulls. He signifies Divine Will. Megh is of the cooling rainy season, clad in yellow and seated on a cloud. Hindola is a swing. Shri is dressed in scarlet and adorned with budding leaves. Dipak, shining in darkness, is the Rag of fire, and Malkaus is a proud warrior.

To the six primary Rags were added many secondary Rags and Raginis (wives) with children called Putra. They were then broadly classified by different authorities into four systems or mats attributed to Shiva, Krishna, Bharat Rishi, and Hanuman. These mats were supposedly reduced to proper scientific order for the famous musician Miyan Tan Sen, during the reign of the Mohammedan Emperor, Akbar (A.D. 1542-1605). Tan Sen also created new and beautiful melodies which gave an added excellence to Hindu music. Unfortunately he left no scientific treatise on music, and it is only through his lineal descendants and a long succession of his pupils that we are able to hear his music today.

Much has been written on the theory and practice of Hindu music in the past, but it is rare to hear the pure Classic Ragas that evoke the particular emotion or state of spiritual consciousness attributed to them.

### **MUSIC APPROPRIATE TO THE DIFFERENT HOURS**

Indian daily life, being permeated with a sense of sacramental values and joy in Nature, is divided into auspicious periods of: worship and mediation, repose and merriment. The early hours before dawn are always associated with meditation and prayer. The afternoon is for



peaceful repose; the twilight hours for reverie and prayer. Evening is for merriment and the hours after midnight for seriousness and solemnity. Each Raga has its appropriate hour. Such an arrangement may seem purely imaginative, but to the Hindu mind the time theory appears to be the definite design of Master-Minds of the past. An analysis of the distinguishing features of many Ragas shows that the whole arrangement of the melodies —is in keeping with the theory of their emotional appropriateness according to the hour.

The periods of **sunrise** and **sunset** when there is a junction between night and day —evoke certain responses in the Hindu mind. These periods of twilight and dawn are called Sandhi Prakash, and Ragas sung during these hours are called Sandhi Prakash Ragas.

**Midnight** and **noon** are also transition points when the merry and mellow evening tunes gradually change to the dreamy and plaintive tunes of morning and vice-versa.

Ragas sung before dawns are slow, dignified and full of pathos. Thus the Rag Jogiya meaning 'a mystic' very appropriately belongs to that period before sunrise when ascetics in India are given to religious meditation. The Raag Bhairav is devoted to the morning praise of Shiva, the Lord of Creation. Then comes Asavari, sweetly devotional and pleading.

Again from noontime on to four o'clock the tunes suggest coolness and repose in the tropic heat of the afternoon. Sarang, sung at midday, is reminiscent of Megh Rag of the rainy season, and has a gliding style which is refreshing and soothing. The melody called Tilang —sung at about three in the afternoon is dreamily smooth, light-hearted and lyrical in character.

There is again a touch of pathos in the tunes of the twilight hour suggestive of evening prayers or longing for the absent loved one. Then follow evening melodies, sparkling and romantic.

After midnight come melodies impressive, proud and sorrowful. There is Malkaus, slow in style and majestic in sorrow. It throbs with grief and its theme is usually a form of elegy or love-lament. Darbari Kanara too is wrapped in melancholy dignity. Its haunting plaintive sweetness has a mystic quality.

Thus the time-theory of Hindu music represents a beautiful and clearly intelligible system of harmonizing melody with emotion, and shows an ingenious comprehension of the spiritual responses of the human heart to the wonders of God's creation.

Indian singers and instrumentalists study years to perfect the intricate technique of *developing* the Ragas, which are merely outlines of the melody. It is the aim of the artist to display the beautiful and delicate coloring of each Raga in elaborate patterns of his own creation, according to his skill and the emotional response which the tune evokes within him. His marvelous improvisations of melody seem to transcend the categories of time and place and draw his listeners with him to the Source of Life and Light beyond.