

## **Karnatic Music: Its Philosophy**

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It is a saying which may be taken as accepted on all hands that this is, in the main, an age of political evolution and material advance. Hence the world's attention is drawn mostly to these all-absorbing topics, and the intelligentsia of every country are engrossed with watching and solving political problems which arise in the course of its national upheaval or with inventing further means of augmenting its economic resources. England, France, America and Japan take the lead in this phase of human activities, and the other so-called civilised countries try to follow their example and profit by their achievements. Art, science, literature and every other department of human thought and action including religion are considered worthy of one's attention and application to the extent that they contribute to the expansion of the arena of political thought and the enlargement of the vision of material progress. Politics and materialism go hand in hand and form interdependent factors in the evolution, so to say, of the present society. Politics based on materialism, and materialism fostered by politics explain the tendency of the present times.

Compared with such a condition of the modern age, the antiquity of all civilised nations on the face of the earth presents a totally different conception of national ideals and had the stamp of real national growth, the underlying principle of the law of evolution. The whole of man's energies, physical and intellectual, was bent upon seeking a solution for the most enigmatic of all riddles—that of life, upon discovering whether there is or is not a superior supervening force, and if so what relation both these entities bear to each other and upon finding out what attributes distinguish one from the other and so on. The ancients seem to have thought that, without a solution of the mystery of a man's own life, his existence was of no avail, even though he was endowed with all the gifts of nature. This domain of man's thought is termed religion or theology in modern English phraseology, Of these two words the latter represents the idea much better than the former, judging from their derivative meanings, though the former is the more popular of the two expressions. In those early times, religion was the primary theme of life, and such other human pursuits as politics, art, science and literature were considered worth one's while simply because they furthered the cause of religion. Hence spiritual culture and divine wisdom may be said to have predominated over every other branch of man's study and formed the background of all his achievements.

Viewing the condition of the present ideals in the light of the foregoing ideals of life, we shall have to conclude, after due deliberation, that the march of evolution is at present on the wane and the so-called progressive civilisation of the twentieth century is more a phantom of the mind than an ascertained fact.

THE ARYAN CONCEPTION OF RELIGION

Now coming to our Aryan culture, this phase of the ancient human mind goes by the denomination of *Dharma Jignasa* as you find it in the very first aphorism of the system of *Purvamimamsa* philosophy *Adhatho Dharma Jignasa*. This aphorism lays down in short that it behoves everyone to investigate 'Dharma' and know it perfectly well. This word 'Dharma' comes from a root, meaning 'to hold' and is defined by Jagadguru Shri Shankaracharya in the following terms: -

*Jagathah sthithi karanam praninam*

*Sakshadabhyudaya hethuryassa dharmah*

'Dharma' is that which forms the basic principle for the stability of the universe, and constitutes the direct means for the attainment of *abhyudaya* (i.e. worldly and heavenly progress) on the one hand, and the realisation of *nissreyasa* (i.e. eternal happiness) on the other. (Vide *Geetha Bhashyam* 1st chapter.) Applying this interpretation to the word Dharma, the aphorism enjoins that everyone should investigate and know on what principle the whole of the Universe rests and what he should do and achieve for the attainment of worldly prosperity and heavenly elevation on the one hand, and for the realisation of eternal bliss on the other. No system of religion other than ours can be said to have crystallised such an idea as to the absolute duty of man, and raised the edifice of spiritual culture on this maxim as the foundation.

#### THE VEDAS: THE BACKBONE OF THE ARYAN RELIGION

That being so *Bharata Varsha* has come to be known as *Dharma Kshetra* and also as *Kuru Kshetra*—the abode of Dharma and the land of Kurus or of *Karma Yoga*—a conception which has baffled the most subtle brains of the present age to recognise and assimilate, as seen from the innumerable conflicting constructions placed upon the teachings of Bhagavan Shri Krishna in His *Geeta*, which begins with those two words, indicating that it is a treatise intended to comprehend the subject covered by those expressions in all its magnitude. If so, it may be asked as to how it has been possible for the Aryans to achieve this world-astounding conception of religion. The answer is that such a conception has become possible for them to behold and realise because the all-supreme God of the universe has thoroughly revealed Himself in His eternal utterings, the Vedas, which are heard and recorded by their ancient seers, the *Maharishis*. Of all the divine revelations given to man, that which is contained in the Vedic lore is considered to be the most perfect as it is admittedly the meeting-ground of all spheres of human action, inaction included.

#### MUSIC DERIVED FROM THE VEDAS

Such being the case, the conception of music also has taken its source from the Vedas, and has been developed and perfected from the rules deduced from, and the examples furnished, by its compositions, especially the *Sama Vedic* hymns. Music is an inseparable ingredient of Vedic

compositions and this is one of the unique features which go to establish their divine origin. The Vedic culture presents two aspects—the ritualistic going by the name of *Pravrithi Dharma* and the spiritualistic termed *Nivrithi Dharma* and both of them employ music for a higher and nobler purpose, each in its own way. How this is I shall try to explain hereafter in brief:

In this connection, it may be well to advert to the several branches of study in the Aryan literary field and their inter-relation if any. Shri Madhusudan Saraswati in his *Prasthanana Bheda* deals about this subject and says: -

"The four *Vedas*, the six *Angas* of Vyakarana, etc., the four *Upangas* of Purana, Nyaya, Meemamsa and Dharma Shastras, the four *Upa-Vedas* of Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda and Arthashastra, all these have their purpose out and out in Bhagavan alone, some directly and the others indirectly. Of these, the *Vedas* consist of verbal compositions of divine origin and supreme authority and treat of Dharma and Brahma *i.e.*, righteousness and spirituality or God. Thus the *Vedas* serve to evolve Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha *i.e.*, *righteousness*, wealth, sensual appeasement and eternal freedom."

Then the author takes up everyone of the above subjects and explains how it has evolved out of the Vedic lore and has contributed to the better understanding of its spirit by elaboration and elucidation thereof. Hence it follows that the Vedic literature, such as it is, is the fountain source of all knowledge, and every other branch of learning is only what has emerged and fructified from its utterances. So much being said about the arrangement of the various systems of study, we now proceed to the subject in hand.

#### GANDHARVAVEDA AND ITS SCOPE

Music takes the appellations of *Gandharva Vidya* or *Gandharvam* in our ancient literature, and it is considered to be one of the four *Upa-vedas* as shown already. The above author summarises its purpose thus in his venerable work:

. . . "Similarly the science treating of *Gandharvaveda* has been elaborated by Bhagavan Bharata. It comprises three different branches of study, vocal music, instrumental music, and dance music, and serves manifold purposes. Its ultimate goal is the worship of God or the Gods on the one hand, and the realisation of unrippled self-consciousness on the other."

We see from what precedes, that the conception of music is a peculiar feature of the Aryan mind, nay, a unique Vedic revelation so to style it, consistently with the traditional shastraic view, and we will do well to understand what it is as far as it lies in our power, and derive all possible benefit.

#### WHETHER MUSIC IS AN ART OR A SCIENCE

A conflict of views is taking place abroad as to whether music is an art or a science or both. In this connection, it becomes essential to define what is meant by art and science, and here again we find divergence of opinion. Whatever, this is, we may conclude that music in general is treated either as an art such as painting and sculpture, or as a science such as physics and chemistry. The more thoughtful section of erudite people take it as a combination of both. Shri Madhusudan Saraswati's definition of music is couched in a language which implies that it is a realisation of something more edifying, which works out the emancipation of the soul from the trammels of repeated births and makes it achieve everlasting bliss. If so, let us make an attempt to understand it, even in a little measure, in accord with the Vedic traditions.

The differentiation of an art from a science and *vice versa* has become visualised to us, the more on account of our contact with English literature. The corresponding expressions in Sanskrit are *Kala* and *Shastra*, and works on music use both of them indiscriminately in reference to it. We find the same thing in the case of some other arts so styled, such as sculpture and painting. If so, does such an uncritical use of the expressions indicate that no such distinction between an art and a science obtains in Sanskrit or that the authors on such subjects were not aware of such differentiation even if others had observed it? It cannot be supposed for a moment that either of the propositions is correct. Subjects such as *Samkhya*, *Tharka* and *Mimamsa* never take the appellation of *Kala* but go invariably by the name of *Shastra* or *Darshana*. This indicates that Sanskrit authors use these expressions not unwittingly, but with a knowledge of all their import. That being so, we have to make further research into the matter in issue before we launch on any such conclusions.

This necessitates that we should form an idea as to what is an art and what is a science, as generally understood according to Western notions. One states art to be 'the doing of a thing' and science to be 'the knowledge of a thing'. This definition seems to follow more from the derivative meanings attached to the words than from the manner of their application to existing facts. Some others define art as something which appeals to our taste or sense of beauty' and science as 'consisting in the classification of facts and the recognition of their sequence and relative significance.' Judging from the way in which we apply the terms, I prefer to define art as a representation or a reproduction of something phenomenal so as to make it appeal to our senses or to our mind, and science as a systematisation of the laws which govern facts and a series of facts which come into existence, being subjected to the law of causation. In other words, whatever expresses the impulses and the passions innate in creation is termed an art, and what formulates and systematises the culture of the human being is a science. The term *Shastra*, the Sanskrit equivalent of the word 'science' means almost the same thing. It comes from a root meaning 'to rule' or 'to correct', and hence it means a collection of laws which govern existing facts or which serve as a corrective of one's conduct in regard to a certain sphere of his activities. The word *Kala* comes from a root which means 'to shine' and is hence applied to denote such arts as arouse our aesthetic tastes.

Considering music in the light of the foregoing observations, we may conclude that music can either be construed as an art or as a science, view-points differing. As something which appeals to our sense of hearing or arouses the inner impulses of the mind and deep-laid emotions of the heart, it affords the highest conception of an art. Again as a concatenation of phenomenal sounds arranged and coordinated in a specific manner and producing well-defined melodies, it has to be styled as a science. Or the scientific aspect of music is that branch of its study which deals with the rules which govern its several poses and which the artist has to obey to steer through its course properly to the satisfaction of the audience.

From what is said above, we see that the generality of theorists have assigned a place to music either in the category of arts or in that of sciences. They seem to take only a superficial view of the matter and do not gauge its inmost realities. The art of painting or sculpture is a representation of forms by the hand of man. The representations are not realities but mere conventional resemblances sometimes expressed in symbols as well. Again the science of physics or chemistry is mostly a collection of laws and their sequence, and deals with dead matter or its forces. So also every art and every science may be traced to technical conventions and natural laws respectively. Now then, will you say that music is a conventional representation of phenomenal facts or a collection of natural laws dealing with lifeless matter or the forces innate therein? No considerate man will say 'aye' to this question.

Music has no conventions about it, since it is a natural product of sounds which permeate the universe. Nor has it any inviolable concern with any such laws of nature, a study of which strains the nerves, because the moment it touches the ear-drum, currents of emotional impulse rush through the mind and throw it into solace automatically, Hence on closer scrutiny we cannot but be convinced that it is neither an art nor a science, strictly speaking, but something transcending both these conceptions and defying our attempts at categorisation.

## MUSIC AND ITS ASPECTS

This transcendental feature of the conception of music is not within the easy reach of ordinary intellects, and hence tendency has arisen to construe it either as an art or as a science, and technical conventions and artificial rules are framed to bring it in line with such a notion or to curb and correct the wayward fancies of the so-called scholars.

In view of the foregoing remarks it may be concluded that music has two aspects—conventional and transcendental. It is the conventional aspect of music which engages the world at large, and not the transcendental aspect of it. This latter aspect belongs to the realm of Aryan culture and that alone. Other nations have not been able yet to reach perfection in music at least as an art or as a science, and a *fortiori* it may take centuries for them even to sight the foreshadowings of this transcendental phase.

## THE TRANSCENDENTAL ASPECT

What is this transcendental aspect of music, which I picture in such radiant colours in the preceding paragraphs? The answer is easily put in a few words. It is a most abstruse subject which I may fail to place vividly before the reader. Perhaps I have not understood it perfectly myself. Whatever that is, I wish to present to him the shadowy glimpses I have gathered of it, incongruous as they may prove after all.

The transcendental aspect of music is that which accords with the highest purpose music is said to serve, namely the attainment of eternal bliss. It is an inviolable rule that the effect is nothing else than the cause itself in another phase or form. Hence that kind of music from which eternal bliss emanates must be that which is itself all-blissful; and what is this all-blissful entity but *Bhagavan Brahman* Himself who is described in the Upanishads in the following terms, *Anandam Brahmethi Vyajanath, "Brahman is bliss."* *Brahman* proper is by himself unmanifest and unqualified. *Aum* is His highest and noblest manifestation with all His attributes of eternity-consciousness and infinity, and thus this *Aum* has assumed the various phenomenal forms by an inconceivable process of disintegration into elements and their subsequent combination to give the resultant phenomena composed of life and matter—life representing the subjective self as emanation or reflection, in all His essence, of the unqualified *Brahman*, and matter affording the apparently-real objective projected out of His qualified personality, *Maya* becoming transformed as such.

The aim of life according to the Aryan theological doctrines is to investigate, as already stated, on what principle the universe rests, and by what means man attains eternal happiness. The cosmos has evolved out of the all-blissful *Brahman* manifested as *Aum* at the inception, and it therefore has its being in that *Brahman* as such. This solution of the fundamental principle of the cosmos suggests the answer to the next question involved in the subject of our enquiry; and it is this. A person who wishes to attain eternal happiness has to realise that he is the subjective self Which is a reflection of the Universal self, that he is as such all-blissful as the *cosmic* self, that the objective matter is only an emanation from or a projection out of the conventional and hence illusive vesture of the *Brahman*, termed *Maya*, and that self-realisation is possible through the medium of the all-pervading, all-blissful sound, a manifestation of the *Atman*.

## SELF-REALISATION THROUGH

### THE MEDIUM OF SOUND

We have to see how sound can be considered the medium of self-realisation. Sound is something more than the effect of vibrations of matter. It is an emanation from *Aum*, the highest manifestation of *Brahman* and it is as such all-blissful as *Brahman* Himself. Bhagavan Sri Krishna says thus in Chapter VII of *Bhagavad Geeta*:

"I am the *Rasa* (taste) of water, the light of the sun and the moon, the *pranava* of the *Vedas*, the sound of the sky, and the manliness of man."

This verse occurs in a context where *Bhagavan* tries to teach His disciple the way to realise Him in the material objects around. He declares in the next previous verse thus: -

"Oh! Dhananjaya! There is no other cause whatever than Myself (for the universe). As a wreath of diamonds is held up in its thread, the visible world is contained and continued in me."

Laying down a general rule in those words, He has amplified the idea by particular examples and the first quoted verse furnishes some such examples. Applying the general rule enunciated in the latter verse, the former verse is thus interpreted: -

"Water exists in such a sensuous form because I am the *Rasa* (for tastefulness) thereof; the sun and the moon are considered centres of life because I am the light thereof; the *Vedas* are such supreme compositions because I am the *Pranava* thereof; the sky (or rather the ether) is known to pervade the cosmos, because I am the sound thereof; and man is turned as such, because I am the manliness in him."

Thus every sound has the imprint of divinity about it and more so the metrical sounds such as we hear when the *Vedas* are recited or when music is produced.

## NADOPASANA

Now we have almost solved what is meant by the transcendental aspect of music. It consists in a recognition of the fact that sound is the supreme manifestation of the all-blissful *Brahman*, and He has therefore to be approached and realised through sound as the medium of communion. This mode of spiritual communion goes by the name of *Nadopasana* in technical phraseology. The word *Upasana* literally means 'to be near' and it is applied as conveying the idea of a person coming in nearest contact with God, so near as to get merged in His personality. *Nadopasana* has therefore to be explained as spiritual communion and self-realisation through the medium of sound.

## PRANAVOPASANA

This *Nadopasana* is of two kinds—*Pranavopasana* practised by *Gnanayogins*, and *Geetopasana* practised by *Bhaktiyogins* and *Karmayogins*. *Gnanayogins* enter into spiritual communion and realise *Brahmanandam* through the medium of *Pranava-dhyanam* as enjoined in several *Vedic* texts such as the following:

"Oh satyakama! *Aumkara* is *Para Brahma* and *Apara-Brahma* alone (personal and impersonal God). Hence through *Aumkara* as the medium, one who knows this fact realises oneness with either."

By certain *yogic* exercises *Gnanayogins* learn to turn the mind and the senses from the outside objective world of distractions and fix them inwardly on the subjective self of abstraction, meditating upon it in the form of *Aum* as ordained in the *Vedic* text. Then they begin to hear the sweet murmurs of the all-blissful *Aumkara* taking its rise in *Mooladhara Chakra* and pervading the whole of the physical and the mental and the spiritual planes. As they thus hear the inward tunings of the *Pranava* sound, they are thrown into an ecstatic condition called *Sakritsamadhi* i.e., once realised blissful state. Thus realising the *Pranava* within the self in the first place, they gradually achieve better vision and realise it ever and everywhere, and are lost in unceasing blissfulness termed *Asakritsamadhi* i.e., constantly realised blissful state. Such a *Gnanayogin* is enabled thus to live in a state of ever-enduring unalloyed blissfulness because he beholds the highest manifestation of *Brahman* in every sound he hears. Thus *Pranavopasana* leads to self-concentration, thence to self-communion, thence to self-realisation which is identical with *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* i.e., everlasting blissfulness. This is *Pranavopasana* of the *Gnanayogins*.

#### GEETOPASANA

Now let us see what is *Geetopasana* practised by *Bhaktiyogins*. To understand it we have to know, in the first place, who is a *Bhaktiyogin* as distinct from a *Gnanayogin* and *Karmayogin*. A *Gnanayogin* is one who practises certain *Yoga* exercises intended for the control and the concentration of the mind and is thereby enabled to detach his mental perspective from the objective world and to focus it upon the internal ego '*Pratyagatman*,' so as to realise *Samadhi* (i.e., self-consciousness or self-blissfulness). A *Karmayogin* is one who is always engaged in performing the ritual ordained by the *Shrutis* (the Vedas), the *Smrithis* and the *Puranas*, either for the attainment of worldly and heavenly desires or for the sake of pleasing God, absolutely with no such desires lurking anywhere in his mind. Strictly speaking, one who performs *karma* with any desire whatsoever is not a *Karmayogin*. The *karma* he does is '*Sakama karma*' i.e., *karma* with desire, and he is styled as *Karmatta*. The other who performs *karma* with no desire whatsoever but to please God is a *Karmayogin* proper, because his *karma* is intended to effect *yoga* i.e., control of the mind. His *karma* is known by the name of *Nishkama karma* i.e., *karma* with no desires. A *Bhaktiyogin*, on the other hand, is one who tries to silence his mind and attain *Samadhi* (i.e., blissful State of the mind) through intense devotion to God side by side with *Nishkama Karmayoga*. He learns to love God with all his might as one loves his child or wife, and gets attached to Him the more with each day. He realises that God is the creator and Lord of all things tangible and intangible, that He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, that He is as such the '*Pratyagatma*' (i.e., the ego) within, and that everything seen and felt is only His manifestation and nothing else. Hence he (i.e., the devotee) gets enamoured of Him (God) all the more and

completely resigns himself to His care and companionship, with the verified conviction that there is none else whom he can approach for the attainment of his only desire *i.e.*, absolute blissfulness. A devotee of this type is styled as *Ananya Bhakta* or *Ekanta Bhakta* and his devotion *Ananya Bhakti* and *Ekanta Bhakti* respectively, the distinction between which is very subtle. Both these kinds of devotion are known by the term *Antaranga Bhakti* as opposed to *Bahya Bhakti* described here under.

A *Bahya Bhakta* is one who realises that God is the be-all and the end-all of all creation as described above in full and constantly engages his *Gnanendriyas i.e.*, sense-organs in appreciating God and His *leelas (i.e., playful acts)* and his *Karmendriyas i.e.*, labour organs, in the active service of God and the God like. Further he keeps company with kindred devotees, leads happy discourses on spiritual problems as a disciple or preaches to others about God and His ways as a teacher. Engrossed in one or all of these ways of divine worship, he derives the utmost pleasure or is merged in blissfulness. His *Bhakti (i.e., devotion)* is named *Bahya Bhakti*. *Bahya Bhakti* literally means devotion expressed in outward acts as well, and *Antaranga Bhakti*, devotion centred inwardly.

Devotees of these two types discard everything worldly and love everything divine, and thereby realise *Gnanayoga* resulting in self-realisation and everlasting blissfulness, (Vide, Chapter X of *Bhagavad Geeta*, Verses 8, 9 and 10).

In all these stages or forms of *Bhakti*, the devotee employs *Geetam i.e., song*, as the pre-eminent medium of self-concentration. When he utters words by the mouth, you find they come out automatically set to music, as it were. When he muses within himself, you can perceive he is *musicing* to himself, if I may so style it. His music may not be similar to that of the so-called scholar. It may be wanting in the technique of the art as we understand it. He may not know the *Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma* of music nor the various forms of time-keeping thereof. Nevertheless, there is music in every word which proceeds from his mouth, in every idea he expresses, and in every gesture he makes; and this is real music because it lulls the hearers into a repose.

One Thalari Rangadas who lived about 25 years ago at Masulipatam was a living example of the foregoing spiritualists. He was not an educated man in the sense in which we understand the phrase, and yet he always delivered his sermons arranged in *ex tempore* metrical compositions automatically set to music. The names of Ramadas, Kabirdas, Thukaram, Thulasidas, Thyagaraja and a host of similar devotees outlive creation, and they afford the best instances of established reputation for my conclusions.

Hence it becomes manifest that *Bhaktas* employ *Geetam (i.e., song)* as an essential means of centralising their spiritual thought and as an assured source of bliss to themselves and to their following. They cling on to this kind of self-enjoyment and congregational entertainment through the medium of *Geetam*, even after they become accomplished *Gnanayogins*. This proves that

*Geetam* is not only a means but an end in itself. That *Geetopasana* bears such fruit is borne out by the testimony of Shri Krishna's utterance in the following oft-quoted verse: -

"Oh Narada! I do not reside in *Vykhunta* nor in the heart of the *Yogins*, nor in the sun; but I am present where my devotees sing (my praises)."

Just as every sound musical or unmusical throws a *Gnanayogin* into endless raptures, every musical sound finished or unfinished enchants a *Bhaktiyogin* and merges him in ecstasy. Thus *Geetam* leads to self-concentration thence to self-communion, and thence to self-realisation, which is the same as *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. Such is *Geetopasana*, *i.e.*, spiritual communion through the medium of *Geetam*.

A *Gnanayogin* or *Bhaktiyogin* above treated of belong to the category of persons who follow *Nivrithi Dharma* sometimes called *Gnanamaraga* and we have seen that they attain *Nirrikalpa Samadhi* through the medium of sound, the former through *Pranavopasana* and the latter through *Geetopasana* as stated briefly by Madhusudana Saraswathy in his *Prasthan Bheda*.

#### GEETOPASANA OF KARMAYOGINS

Now coming to the case of the followers of *Pravrithi Dharma* or *Karmamarga* or *Karmayoga*, you will find that music has a noble part to play in the programme of work. The Vedas themselves are musical compositions as already stated, and the *Samavedic* hymns are such in a much greater degree. The recitation of the Vedas, especially the *Samavedic* hymns forms a primary factor of Vedic ritual, and the *Veena* is employed as an accompaniment in certain functions. Again certain *Upasanas* such as *Pranavodgeetopasana* which accompany the ritual imply that they have to be performed in a musical manner, the Vedic ritual being mostly addressed to the Minor Gods, Indra, Varuna, etc. You find that music is employed to please them in *Shroutakarma*. So also in many forms of *Smarthakarma* music has a very important place to occupy for the purpose of pleasing God worshipped in the form of the several deities for whom they are intended. Thus we see that *Pravrithi Dharma* or *Karma Marga* has assigned a pre-eminent place to music in its observances, and its adherents are able to satisfy the presiding deities all the better for the use of music in their functions. The deities being so pleased, the *Karmayogins* achieve their objects such as *Satya Shuddhi i.e.*, absolute purity of mind, and *Devata Sarupyamu i.e.*, likeness of the deities according to the ideals they set before themselves in the course of their service.

From the above discussion, it may fairly be inferred that transcendental music ranges in three grades or types according to *merit-Pranavopasana* of *Gnanayogins*, *Geetopasana* of *Bhaktiyogins* and that of *Karmayogins*. The first two types lead to self-emancipation sooner or later, and the third makes for the spiritual progress of the votary.

#### CONVENTIONAL MUSIC

Now let us know what is meant by conventional music. It is that kind of music which obtains credit with the world at large either as an art or as a science. We Aryans generally know it by the word *Sangeetam*. Works on music define it as composed of three *elements*—*Bhava*, *Raga* and *Thala*. *Bhavam* may be taken to mean ideas, as generally understood, and emotion as truly interpreted. *Ragam* is defined as a combination of *Swarams*, a *Swaram* being so named as it automatically pleases the hearer's heart. *Thalam* refers to time-keeping. Such a definition of music, of course, covers as well the three types of transcendental music above commented upon, but the three conceptions of *Bhava*, *Raga* and *Thala* are found therein in their *Sukshma Sthithi*, i.e. subtle form, whereas in conventional music they become perceptible in their *Shthula Sthithi*, i.e., gross form. The spirit of subtle things, as everybody concedes, is inconceivable to ordinary minds, and hence the generality of people are not able to discern the splendour and grandeur of transcendental music. Knowing this, our Maharshis have discovered such forms of sounds wherein the all-blissful aspect of *Brahman* becomes manifest even to the untutored mind and named them *Sa*, *Ri*, *Ga*, *Ma*, *Pa*, *Dha*, *Ni* as they occur in nature.

Just as the sun and the moon manifest the all-resplendant attribute of the all-pervading *Brahman* in such a way as everyone may comprehend its glory beyond doubt, the seven musical notes above-named manifest the all-blissful aspect of the all-pervading sound so as to bring it home to each and everyone in all its vividness. The reader will appreciate the truth of the above remarks all the better when he understands the real import of the arrangement of the scale of musical sounds. The scale consists of twenty-two sounds called *Shrutis* arranged into seven periods of *Sa*, *Ri*, *Ga*, *Ma*, *Pa*, *Dha*, *Ni*. Each period consists of several notes and they are pronounced as *Sa*, *Ri*, *Ga*, *Ma*, *Pa*, *Dha*, *Ni*, according to the periods in which they occur. The word *Shruti* means 'that which is heard' and covers every sound produced; and hence it follows that *Shrutis* are innumerable; but every such sound is not a *Swaram* because a *Swaram* is such that it should please the hearer's heart the moment it touches his ears. Such *Swarams* are those which are produced in certain relativity to a given starting sound called *Athara Shruti*. So every *Shruti* becomes a *Swaram* only when it occupies a relative position from a given *Athara Shruti*. I have dealt with the *Shrutis* and the musical scale of *Swarams* in detail in my paper styled, 'Lecture on music' and hence I pass over the matter with these few remarks made for the purpose of this essay.

## MODERN SCIENCE AND MUSIC

Modern scientists of course define a musical sound as one produced by a regular number of vibrations, and noise as produced by an irregular number of vibrations. Regularity and irregularity are only relative conceptions of the ordinary human intellect, and you will be convinced on better research that there is nothing irregular in nature, and that regularity is the dominating principle of the cosmos. My discussion above on *Shrutis* and *Swarams* lays bare the wrong conception of the scientists as regards the definition of musical sounds. The invention of the gramophone supports

my views still further. It records all sorts of sounds—the so-called musical as well as unmusical sounds. If really the so-called unmusical sounds have no regularity about them, they cannot be produced and reproduced in the same manner. Hence the scientist's definition must be taken to be deduced from general notions of relativity and he does not make an accurate statement on the matter with a sound mastery of the cosmic theory. Again our Maharishis have recognised that concepts formed out of words, acid time keeping kept by the hand can be easily grasped by men of ordinary equipment and have prescribed the same as constituting *Bhavam* and *Thalam*. *Bhavam* literally means 'existence' and implies the *Satya* aspect *i.e.* the eternity aspect of Brahman. The derivative meaning of *Ragam* is 'pleasingness' and it connotes the *Gnana* aspect *i.e.* the all-conscious or the all-blissful *Shruti* aspect of *Brahman*. *Thalam* comes from a root-meaning 'time' and it signifies the *Ananta* aspect *i.e.* the infinity aspect of *Brahman*. Our Maharishis perceived that these three aspects of *Brahman*, discernible though they are in every phase of sound, and in every atom of matter evolved therefrom, are vividly manifest in verbal concepts, *Swara* combinations and time-keeping, assuming the names of *Bhava*, *Raga* and *Thala* respectively, and have achieved a system of music on these premises to please all grades of people. This is the conventional system of music as opposed to the transcendental system above described, wherein the three elements of music representing the three aspects of *Brahman* overlap one another, as it were, and become unrecognisable by the lay mind.

#### THE PURPOSE OF CONVENTIONAL MUSIC

The purpose of conventional music is two-fold—first, it is prescribed as a means to achieve access to the sphere of transcendental music, and secondly, it can be utilised as a source of worldly happiness which consists in the appeasement of earthly desires. I may be pardoned when I say that the majority of present day musicians and hearers have the latter purpose in view and not the former.

The next question is, how conventional music secures access to transcendental music, and the answer is this. In all human actions, you find three agencies working—the mind, the tongue and the body. The ultimate object of transcendental music is to attain *Nivriti*, *i.e.*, inaction resulting in and following from self-realisation. *Nivriti* which leads to self-realisation is what should be achieved by a perfect control of the above three agencies of human action, and their undivertible concentration upon *Brahman* seated within and without oneself. We have seen already how in transcendental music, these agencies get centered upon a spiritual plane either inward or outward and almost coalesce into a unified product of self-communion. In conventional music, you have the three agencies working for a common goal, *Bhavam* representing the mind, *Raga*, the tongue, and *Thalam*, the body. If the common purpose be to gain approach to transcendental music, the agencies have to be so wielded as to take you to its portals by continued and sustained efforts for their concentration. Once we reach the avenues of transcendental music through conventional music, it is no longer conventional but more and more transcendental, and

leads you to absolute blissfulness all the sooner. On the other hand, if the common purpose for which the three agencies are employed pertains to worldly advance, you begin to secede from God by degrees and finally get landed in inextricable shoals of self-annihilation.

#### A WORD OF EXPLANATION

The reader may question me how it is that I have not touched the subject proper in spite of so long an expatiation on introductory matter as it appears to be. The answer is not far to seek. He will be mistaken if he considers the preceding observations as constituting a prelude to the subject of investigation. The Aryan system of music has two main branches, the Hindustani and the Karnatic. It is my honest conviction, not based upon any surmises of a layman but upon due deliberation worthy of a practical artist, that the Karnatic school has preserved the individuality of the Aryan conception of music intact much better than its sister school. The Hindustani school is more a hybrid rather than a purely natural product, owing to its assimilation of a foreign system, that of the Mussalmans, to a fault. Hence everything I have stated above appertains to Karnatic music in its philosophical aspect. In my next article, I shall deal with the essentials of Karnatic music.