

CHAPTER - VII

DEVOTIONAL MUSIC OF DIVINE MASTERS

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MUSIC, as a divine gift whose impact on human beings is intensely spiritual, has been in India since the glorious days of the Vedas a Sacred art dedicated to the worship of God in homes and temples. The Vedic seer-singers employed music to invoke and adore the Brahman - that (  $\text{ब्रह्म}$  ) - from whom streamed forth all music. The Vedic 'mantras' were sweet and sublime ~~chants~~ and were ~~chants~~ sung as intuitively heard by seers in moments of contemplation or Samādhi. Vedic music is 'apaurusheya', a divine afflatus springing from within as a revealed flow of music,

an atmic (आत्मिक) delivery working through the holy - 'nirmal' - human heart. Since this music flows out as nothing but the song of Soul in effortless spontaniety during the course of contemplative meditations, our singing seers i.e., Rishis have called it 'Śruti': 'purusha prayatnam binā prakriti - bhoota'.<sup>1</sup> This is the divine music of the Flute Master throwing open the gates of the kingdom of God in the very heart of the singer. Divinity of music lies at the base of the devotional aspirations of the seekers of God through nādānusandhāna. For, this divine quality is not the net result of human effort but a bestowal of Grace of Guru, the 'Sākshāt parabrahma'. Nādupāsanā, of all the arts, has the greatest power to take one away effectively, easily, immediately and fully from the mundane plane and keep our spirit absorbed completely in the spirits' own inner ineffable essence. Self-absorption through soulful singing to please God and seek His grace and Vision (darshan) has been the main inspiration of the lovers of Deshi Sangita.

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1. D.D. Harsha : Samvit Sphulinga : No. 25: Sant Sarovar, Mt. Abu (Rajasthan) Rain 1979, p.21.

Deshi Sangita is the divine seed of Devotional Music (Bhakti Sangita), for this alone is capable to open a window on the "Indivisible Bliss and Blessedness (Akhandā Ananda Aur Saubhagya) (अखण्ड आनन्द और सौभाग्य) which is the true and ultimate goal of life."<sup>2</sup> Bhakti is not, like jñāna, at all a matter of glib talk or vain claim, but one of sustained practice. One's life has to be entirely geared up to a new scheme of values and reorganized in a manner different from the daily humdrum of mundane existence or dissipation. For a spiritual aspirant or devotee who wants to realize his goal, a new syllabus of conduct is needed and a constant endeavour to acquire these new accessories and an eternal vigil to keep oneself upon the path can alone, in good time, bring him near his objective. Not to mention the numerous external temptations and misguides, the mind steeped in age-long 'Avidya' suddenly lets one down, the senses take by ambush even the most vigilant and stab him on the back. Bhakta Prahlād says, in the Bhagavat, that like

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2. Laxmi Narayan Garg : "Bhakti Aur Sangita", article published in 'Nibandha Sangita' edited by himself : Sangita Karyalaya, Hatharas (U.P.), 1978, p. 535.

half-a-dozen wives of a man, the senses, each hankering after its own, tear a man to pieces :

जिह्वैकतोऽच्युत विकर्षति मांसविवृक्षा,  
 शिखोऽन्यतस्त्वगुदरं श्रवणं कुलीशित्।  
 घ्राणोऽन्यतश्चपलहक् स्वच कर्म शक्तिः  
 बह्वयः सपत्न्य इवै गेह पतिं लुनन्ति ॥३॥

Precisely, speaking, devotional path is an uphill path entailing a life of unassailable high moral values which alone serve as the bed-rock of spiritual life of pure devotion. 'Even the Vedas can not sanctify the morally bankrupt ones' ( आचारहीनं न पुनन्ति वेदाः ) "Of the Bhakti the Acharya give the Sadhanas as the avoidance of sense-pleasure and attachments; ceaseless worship of the Lord, listening to and singing the Lord's glory; the grace of the self-realized souls (Vāggeyakāras as described in the previous chapter) and of God".<sup>4</sup> The company of great souls is of utmost significance and value,

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3. Srimad Bhagawata Purana : Gita Press, Gorakhpur, VII. 9.40.

4. Sage Narada : Bhakti Sutra, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, V.S. 2033 (1976), Sutra 37-39, pp. 70-81.

for their association though very difficult to achieve is 'amogha' i.e., never failing in purifying and uplifting the souls in contact. Acts of worship with recurrent singing of devotional songs (bhajan) under the ennobling and instructive guidance of a Vāggeyakāra or Saint Musician are to be performed to stabilize devotion. According to the dictum 'यान्येव साधनानि तान्येव लक्षणाणि' what are means from one point of view and in one stage are the spontaneous emanation of the end itself, from another stand point and in another stage. In fact, the whole thing is a continuous process, the means rising upon the substratum of the end, like waves on the ocean and then becoming part of it. The Bhagawata also calls upon the devotee to dedicate every limb and faculty to the service of God.<sup>5</sup> For, mere knowledge of music without 'Bhakti' does not lead one to the right path. A well-known piece in Dhanyasi declares: 'संगीति ज्ञानं न किं बिना सन्मार्गम् गत्वदे मनसा'<sup>6</sup>. In the stories of the Lord the Bhagawata expound that there should be both

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5. The Bhagawata Purana : Gita Press, Gorakhpur, V.S. 2021, 1964, IX. 4. 18-21, p.16

6. C. Ramanujachari: Spiritual Heritage of Tyaga Raja, Ramakrishna Mission, Students Home, Madras, 1957, p. 43.

music and devotion - रस-अनुराग सहित in prayerful worship of the Lord. Likewise, in his truly poetic and devotional way, Saint-Singer Tyaga Raja plays on the word 'Raga' and juxtaposes two addresses of the Lord as 'Raga-rasika' and 'Raga-rahita' at the end of "Ninu Vina Sukhamu gāna" (Todi), suggesting thereby that the musician's 'rāsikya' should not descend to levels to which it does among many of them.<sup>7</sup> In his Vasantā Song, 'Etla Dorikitiro', Tyaga Raja says that it is a fruit of his sweet music that he has been able to realize God - 'Susvarapu nada phalamo'.<sup>8</sup> Srimad Bhāgawata Purāṇa written by Maharishi Veda Vyas at the behest of Devarshi Narada is often alluded as the fount eternal of ambrosial devotion and even the rise of Bhakti Movement in India is said to have its inspirational source in this very Treatise of Devotion. There is enough evidence to show that the Bhāgawat Sampradaya popularized the path of Bhakti through music all over the country.

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7. C. Ramanujachari: Spiritual Heritage of Tyaga Raja, Ramakrishna Mission, Students Home, Madras, 1957, p. 43.

8. Ibid., p. 43.

Even the Rishi of Chhandogya Upanishad says that music is the essence of everything called life and should thus be worshipped ( उपासीत ) as good ( साधु ) and auspicious. He says : "Speech is the essence of man ( पुरुषस्य वाग रसः ), poetry is the essence of speech ( वाग्नो मृगं रसः ), the Udgitha or Pranava is the essence of poetry, ( साम उदगीथो रसः ); thus this Udgitha or Omkar is the utmost, the most valuable, final essence of all essences ( स एष रसानां रसतमः परार्थो अष्टमो यः उदगीथः )-----'. Thus it is that devotional dedication to music for self or God-realization is of utmost value and good ( समस्तस्य साम्ना उपासनं साधु ) for all. That is the essential meaning and purport of the 'mangal shloka' of Sangita Ratnakar of Saranga Deva : ' वन्दे नादतनुं -----शंकरम् '.<sup>9</sup>

Thus one sees that the Vedas, the epics, the Bhāgavata Purans, Devarshi-s and Maharshi-s have all, with faith, love, enthusiasm and sincerity recommended music as the major and mighty, majestic and mirthful means of devotion

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9. Saranga Deva : Sangita Ratnakar: I. 1.



(195)

to God. The first Poet Valmiki is, says 'Natya Shashtra', one of those great sages who was initiated in dramatics by Bharata Muni, and this speaks why his epic poem Ramayan has an appeal both poetical and musical. Writes Acharya K.C.D. Brahmaspati that this epic "can be played on a stringed instrument in drut, vilambit and madhya laya according to the occasions and can, in accordance with the different rasas, admit of the seven classes of ragas - Sadaaj, Arshabhi, Gandhari, Madhyamā, Panchami, Dhaivati, and Naishadi."<sup>10</sup> Those well-versed in 'gāndharva' and capable of bringing about appropriate murchchhanā in mandra, madhya and tāra sthānas did present Rāmāyana in this very form. The music pattern used in singing Rāma-Kathā by Lava and Kusha was taught to them by Valmiki himself on the lines of Bharata Muni's music. Though no direct evidence is on record, yet it is altogether incredible that Bharat Muni must have been himself influenced by his predecessor - great musician - sages like Nārada, Shāndilya and Yājña Valkyā amongst whom the first two were the renowned Acharyas of Pure or Para Bhakti in those days. For, in Valmiki there are

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10. Acharya K.C.D. Brahmaspati: 'Valmiki And Music' in 'Readings on Indian Music', edited by Gouri Kuppaswamy & M. Hari Haran, College Book House, Trivandrum, 1979, p. 165.

(196)

clearcut references of 'gandharva', like Nārada, Tumburu, Gopa Hala, and Hunu etc. and apsaras like Alambusa, Misrakesi, Vudarika and Vamaṇa.<sup>11</sup> Ayodhya, Kishkindhapuri and Girivraja, (the place of Bharata's maternal grandfather) were famous centres of music of vivid variety. Music included dance and dramatic performances. Hanumāna, the leader of the Vanaras was a great exponent of a school of music and he is till date regarded as a supreme and the sublimest singing devotee of Sri Rama.<sup>12</sup> Even Rāvaṇa, the sovereign lord of Lanka and the Rakshas was a musician par excellences who pleased Lord Shankar with his musical, devotional prayers. His 'Jatā-Katā' musical composition in Sanskrit is even today regarded as one of the holiest hymns or stotras which is very dear to God Shiva. All the musicologists hail Hanumāna and Rāvaṇa as the master musicians of Valmiki's era and the epic itself furnishes ample material evidence in this regard. It is thus that we find Rāma Bhakti and music flourishing and flourishing with a majestic gait in cities and āshrams alike leaving behind a continuous tradition of religious worship and spiritual realization of the Ultimate with the indispensable aid of music.

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11. Ibid., p. 171.

12. T.V. Subba Rao: "Studies In Indian Music", Asia Publishing House, Bombay, London, 1965, p. 209.

But after the coming up of the second great epic 'Mahabharat' written by Maharshi Veda Vyas, a new tradition of Krishna Bhakti emerged with unprecedented vigour, for Lord Krishna was himself a unique singer - dancer of his age and also an incarnation of God who will always be remembered as Yogeswar, on the one hand, and Raseswar and Lilādhīpati, on the other. Popularly known as the flute player of Vrindavana, he was a 'tirtharāja' of jñāna, vairājna and bhakti. Since then India's history of devotional music has run on two tangents : tangent of devotional tradition of Rama Bhakti and that of Krishna Bhakti. Music has been the main<sup>aid</sup> and instrument in the soulful promotions and swift development of Bhakti in home and congregation. Krishna Bhakti movement had its hey day in both the fields, more so in groups or collective concerts and operas of rāsa type. The Rāma lila and Rāsa lila of today are a legacy of the epic days. "Rāsa lilā in Krishna Katha", writes S. Sarada, "is the manifestation of divine love or purified emotion which takes the devotee to the magnanimous height of holy communion with the Lord. It contains 'mādhurya rasa', the crowning element of Bhakti, which leads

to absolute self-surrender and absorption in the Lord Krishna, as a boy of ten years, has shown that through 'mādhura rasa' one can effect total self-surrender or 'Atma Nivedana' and attain Sayujya (absorption in the lord)".<sup>13</sup> In short, Rāsa Lila, was thus a sport meant to build up faith, deepen spiritual yearning, and improve the minds of the Gopis and humanity in general. Rāsa lila is, in higher and more sublime sense, the divine lila of love in the heart of every soul eager for absorption in the vision of the self-supreme. These lilas or divine sports of the lord are legends eternal of devotion and music intermingled with each other as milk and water. Water loses its distinctiveness, its form, its colour, its taste, its very being when it meekly mingles with milk and takes the colour, the form etc. of milk. Music and devotion coalesce with each other in such a measure and way that one finds it extremely difficult to tell it emphatically whether it is music or devotion. Music becomes devotion and devotion music. That is the grace

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13. G. Kuppaswamy & M. Hari Harana: Readings on Indian Music, College Book House, Trivandrum, 1975, p. 180.

and beauty of the divine sport. The truer the music, the more sincere the devotion, the greater perhaps is the power of invocation and appeal.<sup>14</sup>

Rasika Kavi has a very pointed observation to make : "Right from ancient times music has been put in the devotional service of God. A cruel-violent person like Ravana had, by his musical excellence, pleased Bhagawān Shankar. Devarshi Narada was blessed indeed to attain to the divinest state of devotion state of devotion by ceaseless absorbtion in the ocean of rasa. Sangita-moorti Lord Krishna's divine sport (Rāsa kridā) with the gopies of Brija was in essence a grand gala celebration of Music in the truest sense. Sri Rādhāji who is the source-eternal of Devotional Love (Prema-Bhakti) and the crest-jewel of the over new and unfading spring like youth of the female-folk of Brija, has been hailed in scriptures by several epithets such as 'Vēēṇa pāñi', 'Sangita-kushalā', 'Rāgañi' etc. She was Music incarnate indeed. The goddess of learning and

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14. T.V.Subba Rao: Studies in Indian Music, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, London, 1965, p. 207.

wisdom - Saraswati - has been sung in the Saraswati Upanishad as :

विन्यस्त पुस्तकं हस्ते वीणा मंगुलि पद्मवे ।  
भजामि भारतीमाद्यां गीत विद्यावितन्वतीम् ॥ 15.

By implication, music was inspired by devotion and devotion was felicitated and glorified by music in ancient times. So much so that the Lord Vishnu himself sang out to Devarshi Narada : "O, Nārada ! I stay neither in Vaikuntha nor in the heart of the yogis. I stay only where my devotees 'sing' (with love and dedication)".

नाहं वसामि वैकुण्ठे योगिनां हृदये न च ।  
मद्भक्ता यत्र जायन्ति तत्र तिष्ठामि नारद ॥ 16.

Lord Krishna has likewise told Arjuna in Adi Purana : "O, Arjuna ! I tell you the truth that I am virtually sold out to him who sings my glorious Names and revel in me."

गीत्वा च मम नामानि विचरेन्यमसिद्धिर्वा ।  
इति श्रवीमि ते सत्यं क्रीतोऽहं तस्य चार्जुन ॥ 17.

15. Rasika Kavi: 'Bhakti Aur Sangita' in 'Sangita', Hathras (U.P.), July, 1973, p. 39.

16. Lord Vishnu : Padma Purana by Maharshi Ved Vyas, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1986, 94. 21.

17. Rasika Kavi: 'Sangita', Hatharas (U.P.), July, 1973, p. 41.

(201)

Bhakta Rāja Hanumāna is an illustration on the point who won Sri Rams' eternal presence and patronage only through singing the glory of His name.

It is worth observing in the context that the history of pure Music in India is broadly the history of Saint or Poet-musicians who created landmarks on the long road of evolution of music in India. Saint singers include poet-musicians and Acharyas who not only lent philosophic vitality to devotional literature but also contributed to the renaissance spirit in music and musical compositions. Before and since Shankar, Rāmānuja, and Mādhva there have been many of these individuals carrying the tradition of religio-philosophical leadership down to contemporary times. In Bhāgawata, the Prince among ~~xxxxxx~~ Devotees, Prahalāda speaks of nine aspects of Bhakti:

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् ।  
अर्चनं वंदनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥ १९.

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19. Sri Bhagawata Purana: Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1982, VII. 5.23. P. 799

(i) Hearing of the Holy Word ( श्रवणं ); (ii) Singing of God's glory ( कीर्तनं ); (iii) Remembrance of God Vishnu ( स्मरणं ); (iv) Self surrender and service at the lotus feet of the Lord ( पादसेवनम् ); (v) Salute-ful offering of flowers to the Lord ( अर्चनम् ); (vi) Supplication with Prayerful or Hymnal Invocations ( वन्दनम् ); (vii) Pure Emotion of service supreme at the Altar of Almighty God ( दास्यम् ); (viii) Through Pal-ship ( सख्यम् ); and (ix) Total surrender and Absorptional Dedication to the Lord ( आत्म निवेदनम् ).

Devotion is thus a nine-facted gem polished, processed and perfected by the purifying flame of love. Love is the song of soul sung by the Lord of life on the lyre of devotee's heart. When the Lord Sings He is a Deshika and His music is 'deshi' sangita', but when the devotee sings he is a disciple and the music he plays is 'margi sangita'. Devotional hearing ( श्रवणं ) from the 'deshika' and then singing ( कीर्तनं ) his glorious music as heard is a divine act of devotion which ultimately, flowers and fructifies into 'ātma-nivedana', which is fulfilment of life, on the one hand, and fulfilment of margi into deshi sangita on the other.



This is in brief a pen-picture of the intimate, rather inalienable alliance of music and devotion as discernible in peoples' life of ancient India. Such an intimate relationship between the two went on for a long time till a new development in their mutual kinship is seen just before and since the medieval ages of Indian history. Before and during the medieval times the rise of āchāryas and new religio-philosophical systems stepped up both music and devotion to new heights. Sometime in the sixth century A.D. partly because of a reaction against asceticism, and also on account of the Buddhist refusal to acknowledge either the authority of the Vedas or the existence of the Soul, there began to appear a succession of great saint-leaders, worshippers of Shiva and Vishnu, who taught complete surrender by way of Bhakti or personalized Gods.<sup>20</sup> Those who worshipped Shiva were Nāyanārs (leaders), followers of Vishnu were known as Ālvars (divers into the divine). The Nāyanārs and Ālvars were poets and musicians, and used fervent devotional songs and musical compositions to convey their spiritual messages. Not all

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20. Simon Robert Leopold : Spiritual Aspects of Indian Music, Sundeeep Prakashana, Delhi, 1984, p. 17.

of these heralders of devotional affluence of divine music were Sanskrit knowing leaders; and, therefore, a vast amount of vernacular literature sprang up though a great portion of bhakti-songs remained the hall-mark of this renaissance devotional upsurge.

Along with these Nāyanārs and Ālvars there were the 'Siddhars'. They were the Tamil bhaktas, dating back to the early revival of Shaivism. "Tradition acknowledges eighteen Siddhar composers from the 6th century to the 16th century."<sup>21</sup> The most important factor which emerged along with the rise of bhakti during the early middle ages was the assembling of the largest collection of all Sanskrit writings including the Purāṇas. Out of the eighteen, six Purāṇas six relate to Brahma, six to Lord Vishnu and the six to Lord Shiva. Of all the Purāṇas, the Vishnu Purāṇa and Bhāgawata Purāṇa are of great importance to the Vaishnavas; Shiva Purāṇa and Skanda Samhita are highly valued and regarded as most important by the Shaivites. Whether Shaivas or Vaishnavas, all speak and sing of Advaita and their devotion is indubitably non-dual

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21. Ibid., p. 24.

in essence and character. This is the contribution of the Nāyanārs, Ālvars and Siddhars to the continuing tradition of the Bhakti Movement in India.

In addition to the poet-singers who traversed the country singing of their devotion to God and debating the non-believers, there were the Acharyas. The word 'āchārya' means, literally, teachers; however, in a strict sense, they were the Vedantic philosophers. Shankar, Rāmānuja, Madhava and Vallabha were the four great āchāryas whose philosophies still dominate Hindu thought today. These āchāryas were not merely master-expounders and scholarly interpreters to the mystic meaning of our scriptures and sacred lore including the 'Prasthāna Trayī' and 'Prasthāna Chatuṣṭaya', but also soulful singers of the Vedas and the Nāda Brahma, par excellence. Since the paramount concern of this chapter is not to examine and evaluate the metaphysical contribution to the philosophical or spiritual literature of India but only to discover and delineate the essential and unitive bond of kinship between Dharma and Sangita in India, it is enough to state at this

stage the āchāryas and Ālvar-saints flooded whole of India, especially the South Indian region, with the love-lorn devotional stream of Nāam Sankirtana (नाम सं-कीर्तनम्). "Each and every Name of God," writes Pt. L.N. Garga, "is a mystical rubric (mantra) in itself. The seed-power of consciousness (चेतन्यस्य बीज शक्ति) latent in each Name or Rubric is awakened into its fullness with the help of singing it with 'Svara' and 'Laya'".<sup>22</sup> Vallabha, Chaitanya, Sūrdāsa, Tulasī, Mira, Purāṇdar Das, Tyaga Raja, Tuka Ram, Narasī, Gorakha, Hari Das, Jay Deva, Vidhyapati, Dharma Das, Nānak, Khusaro, Baiju Bāwarā, Kabir, Palatu, Dadu, Sunder Das, Charana Dasa, Sahajo Bai etc. were the far-famed amongst those mystic-musicians at whose expert hands music became divine and devotion musical.<sup>23</sup> Both music and religion were ennobled and enriched by the devotional exuberance of these singing Saints.

For brevity's sake let us consider few famous and representative saint-poets and musicians who were adept Deshikas and mystics at the same time, and who enriched our classical music with streams

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22. Laxmi Narayana Garga : Bhakti Aur Sangita, Nibandha Sangita, Sangita Karyalaya, Hatharas (U.P.), 1978, p. 535.

23. Ibid., p. 535.

of deshi sangita and mārgi sangita. Jaya Deva Goswami (12th-13th century A.D.) was one of the first mystical singers of Vaishnavite Bhakti. His 'Geeta Govinda' is regarded as a classic of devotional music.<sup>24</sup> Herein, he sang of the love of Lord Krishna and Rādhā with great emotion, depth and sincerity. A highly influential landmark in the development of bhakti thought is this allegorical Sanskrit song - cycle, Gita Govinda. In this Testament of Devotional Love, Jaya Deva makes Radha the consort of Krishna; she represents the human soul longing to be united with the universal soul.<sup>25</sup> In 24 astapadīs extant at that time (stanzas), set in tālas and rāgas it describes Radha's separation from Krishna, her jealousy and longing because he is sporting with other Copis. Much as did the Tamil Sangam poets of 1000 years earlier, he employs the "compansion" of Radha to intercede with Krishna, and in the final episodes Krishna and Radha are passionately re-united. The Gita Govind not only was the springboard for a vast output of bhakti thought, literature, and music, but the singing of its verses (ashtapadis) during bhajan rites is

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24. G.S. Mansukhani: 'Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtan', Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1982, p. 73.

25. Simon Robert Leopold: Spiritual Aspects of Indian Music, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1984, p.37.

still current, especially in south India. For eight centuries the Gita Govinda has remained the highest symbolic example of bhakti and the single most influential musico-poetic work on subsequent individual poet-singers and bhakti-movements.<sup>26</sup>

From the 12th century Vaishnavism was the most important religious movement in Bengal. Vidyāpati, Chandi Das and Mahāprabhu Chaitanya fervently sang Krishna's glory and lent a spur to the devotional renaissance in the country. Chaitanya not only sang but danced on streets in groups and contributed considerably to the development of bhakti movement. He was a great scholar of erudite learning and exquisite expression, but he chose bhajan-singing as the medium of his work. Like Kabir, Sūrdāsa and Tulsai Chaitanya Mahāprabhu composed many bhajans i.e., hymnal compositions which became very popular and were sung in homes and temples.<sup>27</sup> His contribution to the spiritual movement of devotional overtones was indeed deep and pervasive, but his services to the promotion of

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26. Ibid., p. 37.

27. G.S. Mansukhani: Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtana, Oxford and IBH Publication, New Delhi, 1982, p. 6.

classical music of India are well-established except that he composed hymns and sang them through traditional rāgas; and that the 'Hare Krishna Hare Rāma' movement started by His Holiness Sri Prabhupād in the United States and elsewhere in the world has today become a new religious and devotional force to be reckoned with.

In the middle ages thereafter, especially during the period covered by Emperor Akbar's reign, both sacred and secular music reached a high watermark of excellence and classicism. Three names, by their very magneticism, draw our appreciative attention immediately : Swami Hari Dāsa, Tānsen and Baiju Bāwarā. Most people know Swami Hari Dāsa merely as a revered Teacher of Tānsen, but few are aware of his lasting contribution to the world of music, and few still will believe that he was a greater and a nobler musician than Tansen himself. Hari Dasa occupies a leading and a prominent place, almost as unique as one enjoyed by St. Tyaga Raja. He was a mystic musician par excellence and a time-honoured Guru of the two best musicians of Akbar's time : Baiju Bāwarā and Tansen. As a faithful, loving, reverent and sincere devotee of Lord Krishna

(Bihāriji of Brindāvana), Hari Dasa raised music to the holy heights of mysticism and lived in direct "communion with God through his music and devotion."<sup>28</sup> Brija Bhoomi thus became the focal centre of devotional music and mysticism. "One of the greatest Dhrupad singers and composers (Vāggeyakāra)..... he has left a legacy of a large number of Prabandhas and Dhrupads which are still being sung in temples."<sup>29</sup> So much so that he began to be regarded in his own lifetime as an incarnation of Lalitā Sakhi, one of the most intimate, dearest and nearest friendly-female-attendants on Radha Rani, the beautiful beloved of Lord Krishna.<sup>30</sup> Drenched in 'madhuri bhāva', he used to ceaselessly sing Shyāma, Shyāma in different rāgas and tālas matching the call of time. His music was not for worldly entertainment but it was the path of his devotion, a means to please his Deva Bhakta Vyās calls him "ananya nripati" (अनन्य नृपति), and Saint Nābhā Dāsa spoke of him as 'Gayan Kala ka Gandharva' (गायन कला का गन्धर्व).<sup>31</sup> His

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28. Susheela Misra: Great Masters of Hindustani Music, HEM Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, p. 18.

29. Ibid., p. 20.

30. Ibid., p. 20.

31. Ibid., p. 20.



successors in the Sampradāya have included many fine poets - Beethal, Vipul, Viharidas, Rasik Lal, Lalit Kishoridas, Peetambar Das, and others. Hari Das's two important works are : Kelimal, and Ashtādasā Siddhānta kā Pad. In the former, eleven main rāgas which he sang in his own musical compositions are mentioned : Nat, Gauri, Kānhadā, Kedara, Kalyān, Sārang, Bibhas, Bilawal, Malhar, Gaṇḍ, Basant and Composed several "padas" in each. The various musical instruments mentioned, and perhaps played, by him are : Mridang, Dhap, Jhaanjh, Manjērā, Kinnari, Rabab and Bansī. The portraits and sketches of St. Haridas, however, show him armed with a small tanpura.

Saint Hari Dasa was not merely a mystic musician of great note and devotion, but a great Guru too. He had several disciples amongst whom the following eight were famous so much so that two of them Baiju Bewara and Tansen made history : They were, in addition to these two, Gopal, Rāmdāsa, Madan Rai, Diwakar Pandey, Somnātha, Soor Sen and Baiju (from Champa Ner in Gujarat). The brilliant disciples of St. Hari Dasa composed numerous Dhrupads, Dhamār's, Tarānās, Triwats, Raga malikas and created many new rāgas which have been a rich

inheritance in the samprādayika history of devotional music. In short, St. Hari Das was in himself a rare school of inspired music which was atonce 'deshi' when he sang for Lord Krishna and 'mārgi' when he sang for the students to be taught. Even when he sang for students, he thought he was doing indirect service of God only.

Baija Nath, later on famous as Baiju Bāwarā, was a noble and sublime soul who, like his Guru Swami Hari Dāsa, sang for God and Guru only. Only one incident would suffice to bring out the extraordinary and un-imaginable powers of musical excellence he acquired through his devotion to music and dedication to God. He was so much God-intoxicated that he would roam, from forest to forest as a 'Bāwarā', as one unconcerned about the external world. He left Brindavana, went away into the hills and remained unknown for years. Swami Hari Dāsa had grown old by that time and Tansen was one among the new disciples after Baija Nath had gone away. Tansen heard from his Guru about Baija Nath and made up his mind to find out his elderly Guru Bhāi. Years rolled by but nothing could be known about Baiju. Once when Tansen was at the helm of musical affairs, as one of the nine gems of Akbar's court, he thought of a

device. It was declared on drum-beat that Sangita Samrat Tansen was on 'Sangita Dig Vijaya' (i.e. World conquest in Music) and whosoever was a Guru-Worthy musician should either excel Tansen in singing or accept his service and subordination. Scores of musicians flocked to the court. They sang with all their acquired excellence and mastery but their music sank into nothingness before Tansen's. They were humbled, but were honoured in the royal court. Coincidentally, Baiju was back in Brindāvanā in those days, but Tansen did not know it. Neither Tansen had ever seen Baiju nor had Baiju ever seen or heard about Tansen. The 'Sangita Dig Vijaya's' announcement was enough challenging, especially when Guru-worthyship was at stake. Baiju accepted the gauntlet and a musical combat was arranged in good grooves in the vicinity of Agra.

It was early morning. The place was all decorated with regal pomp. The emperor with his queens and retinue was also present. Tansen sat on side of the courtly platform with his royal and musician attendants. On the other side was Baije Nath, all alone, in the simple attire of a wanderer. But there was a glow on his face and his eyes

sparkled with confidence. He looked inspired. Tansen felt intrinsically drawn towards him, but in want of any introduction, his royal status prevented him from establishing any personal dialogue. The emperor gave the signal, competition began.

Tansen sang 'Todi' raga. It had a tremendous appeal and the impact was soon visible when a group of deers came running from the nearby grooves and stood beside the singing Tansen. Soon Tansen picked out a necklace and placed it around the neck of music-lover deer. When Tansen stopped singing, the deer ~~looked around~~ and afraid of peoples' presence, the group of deers ran away and disappeared into the forest where from it came.

It was now apponents' turn. Baiju addressed to the Emperor thus: "Well, Sire ! Tansen is a great musician who, by marvel of his Todi, had called from the forest a group of dancing deers. I will now sing 'Mriga Ranjani raga' by which unique spell only that deer will come here who had taken away the necklace of Tansen." The sweet sombre melody of Baiju's 'mriga-ranjani' soon filled the pandal, men and women-folk listening to the music were emotionally overcharged and virtually dumb-founded, and to their great wonder, they saw the

deer with the necklace meekly coming and enjoying a standing posture beside Baiju in an extremely loving pose. Baiju lifted the necklace from the deer's head and gently passed it on to emperor Akbar.

It was a stunning experience for all, more so for Tansen who was all the time wondering as to who the contesting musician was ! Wonderment of people mounted high when Baiju addressed the emperor thus : "I have responded to the music call of Tansen by giving the performance of 'mriga-ranjani'. It is turn of Tansen to respond to my call. I will sing 'Malkausa' whereby this huge marble pillar will turn into soft wax <sup>Pillar</sup> ~~like substance~~ wherein I shall fix my tanpura. The moment I stop singing, the wax-substance would regain the solidity of the marble and my tanpura shall remain stuck up in it.... Let Tansen sing and secure the safe release of my tanpura from its marble-encasement."

Having thus addressed, Baiju sang melodiously with mounting and melting thunder and it happened as he had said. Stone began to soften and melt Tansen's surprise knew no bounds. He could not contain his feeling of intense happiness, charged by heart felt wonder; and, as such, he

rose from his seat and fell, in all humility, at the feet of the Guest Gayak saying : "As I was hearing your serene and soulful music, I was reminded of my holy Guru who used to say - 'Tanna, there is your elder guru-bhai who sings better than you do'. I do not know why I feel drawn towards you. Be kind enough to disclose your identity." The moment both Baiju and Tansen realized that they were the students of the same Guru, Sri Hari Dasa Maharaja, they got caught up in mutual hearty embrace. Tears, that rolled down on their cheeks, greeted each other with cosy warmth beyond words.<sup>32</sup>

A word about Tansen now. Of all the luminaries in devotional classic music of India, it is Tansen's name that has become, says Susheela Misra, 'a synonym for musical genius and perfection'.<sup>33</sup>

He was so fascinating, lucky and great a musician that Abul Fazal, a contemporary of his, in 'Ain-i-Akabri' exclaims: "There has not been such a

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32. Pt. L.N. Garg: 'Sangita Nibandha': Sangita Karyalaya, Hathras (U.P.), 1978, pp.576-577 (Full Anecdote).

33. Susheela Misra: Great Masters of Hindustani Music". HEM Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, p. 11.

musician in the past thousand years, neither will there be another."<sup>34</sup> Naturally every school of musicians and almost every other Muslim musician claim to be descendants of his genius. However, as a true disciple of Swami Hari Dasa and younger Guru-Bhai of Baiju Bawara, Tansen's glory and worthiness as 'Sangita Samrat' of his time remain untarnished. As one of the 'nine gems' of emperor Akbar's court, he excelled all his rivals figuring in the glorious and glittering galaxy of Hindustani musicians of his times.

Tansen lived in a period when 'dhrupad' reached its highest degree of popularity and so his compositions and style of singing were of this type. "Both in their poetic beauty and musical grandeur his compositions are some of the best songs we have".<sup>35</sup> He is credited with thousands of 'dhrupads' and authorship of three major works: Sangita sar, Raga Mala, and Sri Ganesha Stotra. Some of his 'dhrupads', writes Chaitanya Deva in his monumental work 'An Introduction to Indian Music', which have musical technicalities as their

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34. Chaitanya Deva : An Introduction to Indian Music, publication division, GOI, Delhi, 1981, p. 96.

35. Ibid., p. 98.

~~libretto~~  
~~libretto~~ (sāhitya) reveal his profound insight into musical intricacies like sruti, grama and moorcchhana.<sup>36</sup> Tansen had complete command over ragas through which he could work many miracles such as "taming a maddened wild elephant, bringing nightfall at noon, causing flowers and buds to burst into spring-bloom and so on".<sup>37</sup>

In a brilliant era of great poets and composers like Sur Dasa, Ram Dasa, Tulasi Dasa, Meera Bai, Baiju Bawara and many more, Tansen was esteemed high not only by kings, courtiers and commoners, but also by excellent and eminent personalities in the high heaven of literature.

Sur Dasa says:

भलो भयो विधि ना दिये शेष नाग के कान'  
 चरा-मेरु सब डोलत तानसेन की तान" 38.

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36. Ibid., p. 98.

37. Susheela Misra: 'Great Masters of Hindustani Music', HEM Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, pp. 11-12.

38. G. Kuppaswamy & M. Hari Haran: 'Reading on Indian Music', College Book House, Trivandrum, 1979, p. 156.



'Thanks to the Creator that he did not give ears to Shesha Naga (on whose sprawling hoods rests the entire universe) ! For, the earth and the mountains - all swing to Tansen's music'. There can be no greater eulogy of a musician, and there is no greater mystic poet and singer to pay so high a tribute.

An unsurpassable master singer of Dhrupad and Dhamañ, which rose to majestic heights of musical excellence at his hands, Tansen belonged to Gaudi style (vaani) of Dhrupad gayaki. The other three main styles were : Khandari, Nawhar, and Dagur Vaanis' of Dhrupad singing. Prof. O.C. Goswami makes his considered observation about Tansen's music thus: "Tansen was an outstanding force in the music of India. He found music an uncharted ocean of Ragas and Raginis which, in his time numbered 4000. He examined and analysed them, discarded a bulk of them, and retained only four hundred".<sup>39</sup> In doing so, he took inspiration from Bhakta Siromani Sur Dasa. He says: 'Surmani ko pranama kari, sugam karo sangita'. He reduced

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39. Sushela Misra: Great Masters of Hindusthani Music: HEM Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, p. 13.

the bewildering number of 92 taals into a manageable 12, and revealed several secretly guarded aspects of classical music in his valuable treatise 'Raga Mala'.

Tansen was certainly "a rare genius who combined in himself a brilliant practical musician (kaṣṭāwant) as well as a superb poet-cum-composer (Vāggeyakāra)"<sup>40</sup> His music was at once devotional and divine as is obvious from one of his musical compositions:

नाद समुद्र को पार न पायौ, स्तुतियत गुनी कहायौ,  
प्रबन्ध हँद, धारु-ध्रुपद मारी-देसी है विधि गायौ।  
ब्रह्मा वेद उचरायौ, सारंग चौरायौ, भरतमत,  
कल्लिनाथ, हनुमत् मत, सप्तोद्धाय गायौ।  
अनेक सृष्टि रचि-पचि गये ब्रह्मा-विष्णु-रुद्र,  
महामुनि प्रसन्न भये, सारंग बौरायौ।  
सप्त प्रगट सप्त गुप्त गायक गोपाल ध्यायौ,  
"तानसेन" लाकौ प्रभु बैजू पावन पिछलायौ।

The song of Tansen which is in 'Ragini' Multani Dhanḍa-Sri, Chautāla,<sup>41</sup> speaks volumes of his wonder creativity, soulful gratitude and musical excellence, on the one hand, and of Tansen's

40. Ibid., p. 13.

41. Dr. Hari Har Niwas Dwivedi: 'Tansen "Jeevani, Vyaktitva tatha Kartritva': Vidya Mandir Prakashan, Gwalior, July, 1986, pp. 13-14.

personal view of a Real Musician i.e., a <sup>Gāyāk</sup>~~Gyake~~ and Nayaka. The purport of the song is:

"Extremely difficult it is to ferry across the Ocean of Sound ! He who experiences or hears Nada is hailed as an adept (guni); he is a creative genius, an architect of prabandha, chhanda, dharu-dhrupad styles and a superb singer of both the 'deshi' and 'margi' sangita. The holy word of wisdom was sung aloud by Brahma, the god of creation, and 'sarang', deer-like-mind was stunned to stay motionless. Then there sprang up the Rainbow of the seven Realms of Music, as is sung in the scriptures of Bharata, Kallinatha and Hanumān. When the 'margi' sangita (aneka srishti) given grafted, grown and guarded by the guru as Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra was delved and digested (rachi-pachi), then the Mahamuni i.e. the Guru, in his cheer, showered his grace and even sārang pāñi was bewildered. In that meeting moment of the ascending 'margi' and descending 'deshi' sangita the Indwelling Self (Nayak) as the 'protector of senses' (Gopala) perceived all the seven manifest (sapta pragat) and seven unmanifest (sapta a-pragat) realms of music. Tansen says:

'that Realm of Music it was with which Baiju, the beloved of my Lord (Swami Hari Dasaji Guru), caused the stone to melt."

Obviously, indeed, 'margi' sangita fulfils itself into 'deshi' sangita and the Deshika is the ocean of music, of bliss and blessedness, an incarnation of 'nāda' and 'shabda' brahma at the same time. Music finds its fullness only in mysticism. That is the essence of Tansen's life and his devotional music's excellence.

As was a new era ushered in music in Northern India, by the Holy Trinity of St. Hari Dasa, Baiju Bawara and Tansen, so also in Karnatak music a new epoch was created by 'The Trinity' - 'Trimooriti' - of Shyama Shastri, Tyaga Raja, and Muthaswami Dikshitar. Surprisingly, all the three were, like the Northern Trinity, contemporaries and were born in the same village, Tiruvarur in the Tanjore district of South India. Shastri was a great scholar, a pious priest and a composer of great merit. Dikshitar was a great devotee, a ravishing violinist, a suave composer

and an expert in the use of doubling the tempo in musical progression. Every song he composed came to him as a mantra. Tyaga Raja was saint musician of the perfect type. There is a saying in South India that "the music of Tyaga Raja is like a grape - the moment you put it in your mouth, it dissolves and is sweet; that of Shyama Shastri is like a *banānā* - one has to peel the skin to eat it. But the art of Dikshitar is like a co-co~~n~~-nut: if you want to taste the milk inside; you will have to break the hard outer shell."<sup>42</sup>

In context of the devotional music of the divine masters, it is apt and enough to taste the grape like music of Tyaga Raja only.

Tyaga Raja sang in humility : Many are the great souls; to them all my salutations !"  
This one single dictum is sufficient to show the spiritual orientations and the devotional fervour with which he must have contributed to the majestic march of the music of the Divine Masters. "For, no musician, with exception of Purandar Dase, revolutionized and gave a new direction to Indian music as he did."<sup>43</sup> His life and works are viewed as a miracle of miracles.

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42. Chaitanya Deva: An Introduction to Indian Music, Publications Division, GOI, New Delhi, 1981, p.122.

43. Ibid., p. 114.

Though in all the compositions of Tyāga Raja, the basis experience was spiritual and musical, it is possible broadly to discern three different states which gave rise to three types of compositions. In large gatherings of people for 'bhajan' where he felt in unison with Śrī Rama as the Indwelling spirit of all, he started with 'Divya Nāma Sankirtana' which are studded with euphonious words lilting rhythm and simple melody. Great as he was in stepping up the Kirtan's melody with devotional communion-ship with God, Śrī Rama, everyone in the congregation participated in the musical experience with zest of devotion and this gradually results in the enrichment of taste for higher music and values of nobler life. An ordinary 'gāyaka' or singer under the sublime spell of the 'divya-nama-sankirtana', often tended to be a Bhāgawata from the core of the heart. Such 'sankirtans' served as a reconciler of classes and masses in devotional matters.

Next to 'nāma sankirtana' there is a class of composition in which both music and words are of equal importance and significant from the view-point of aesthetic feeling. Such songs often

became the singable musical property of throngs of people for the simple reason that even the middling talent could easily and with gusto assimilate the rhythm and melody in their musical renderings. The third and most highly evolved form of composition is what is today called 'kriti'. Here the expression is purely musical, rhythm is more subdued and slow, and the whole mood is of utter tranquility. Thus writes C. Ramanujāchāri that in view of how he had rescued music from falling into the mire of mere mundane embellishments and lifted it up in the art of ennobling human life. "Tyaga Raja's musical contribution is remarkable for its quantity and variety, as much as for its quality. The highest musical excellence is found in his compositions which we have come to call 'kriti's' in which he captured and effectively picturised the essence of Ragas".<sup>44</sup>

Tyaga Raja's literary genius was as great as his musical genius. Spiritually, too, he was one of the rare souls who gave up everything

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44. C. Ramanujachari: The Spiritual Heritage of Tyaga Raja, Sri Ram Krishna Mission Students' Home, Madras, 1957, p. 30.

except 'Bhakti' and cared for nothing else beyond the Grace of God. He was a 'bhakta' of pure water and the only meaningful act for him was complete surrender to Him whom he called Rāma. We are told he was initiated by a Sanyāsi, Sri Ramkrishnānanda who gave him the 'Rāma Taraka Mantra'.<sup>45</sup> "The word Rama (RA - MA) writes Chaitanya Deva, "was to him a Numen that transcended all names". He sings: As what did they define you? How did they worship you ? - as Siva, as Madhava, as Brahma born of Lotus or as Para Brahma, the Trans-Godhead ? I prostrate myself before those who know the secret of 'MA' as the life of 'Siva-Mantra' and 'RA' as the life of Narayana-Mantra".<sup>46</sup> He goes so far as to say, that in the beginning was the Word which is the primordial sound Rāma, the Divine Person, was but the visual form of It. See how magnificently the thought-process is evolved in Tyaga Raja. First he tells people to practise 'bhakti' through the channels of music; then he tells that they should devote themselves exclusively to the practice of music and yet win salvation; and lastly, he makes bold to say that music is the

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45. Chaitanya Deva : An Introduction to Indian Music, Publication Division, GOI, New Delhi, 1981, p. 118.

46. Ibid, p. 119.



Ultimate Thing and that even 'avatāras' are but the manifestations of it.<sup>47</sup>

Precisely, Tyaga Raja has not only linked music with devotion but with the whole scheme of existence. Music is thus the religion of man's life.

But the wheel of time that brings glory and greatness, has the power to bury the glory too. The dignity and devotion which 'dhrupad' and 'dhamar' enjoyed upto the good old days of St. Tyaga Raja and Tan Sen dwindled a lot when Sadāranga willy nilly associated with Mohammad Shah Rangeele, deviated a little from the traditional 'dhrupad' and created 'kheyal' in music. In creating the kheyal type he must have experienced the gradual 'woodenness' that had crept into his contemporary 'dhrupad' with its more than mechanical insistence on arithmetical rhythm. As a departure from this bondage, he composed 'keyals'. In the last part of the 19th century, however, India witnessed a renaissance in music and the musicologists began to weave their writings anew. It was in this wake

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47. T.V. Subba Rao: 'Studies in Indian Music', Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p. 206.

that the musicians began to experience that there was a need for a search of bridging the gap that was widening between the illiterate-but of no inferior quality - artistes and the grammarians. "The situation was not a very happy one", writes Chaitanya Deva, "But Vishnu Nārayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, two gigantic personalities, appeared on the scene and gave a new direction to Hindustani music, specially to its theoretical and social aspects."<sup>48</sup> The monumental contribution of Bhatkhande, the pioneer of modern renaissance in Indian classical music was his collection and publication of compositions in Hindusthani music. Likewise, Paluskar's services to music were of no less significance. He was a chosen disciple of the grand old Balkrishna Buwa, <sup>Ichalkaranjikar</sup> the doyen of musicians in Maharashtra.<sup>49</sup> Paluskar is famous as a towering figure in the field of music, a musician of high order, a great teacher, a man of uncompromising moral courage and a soul imbued with the awareness of the social values of art. In spite all the name and fame that these two leaders of renaissance in music of modern India enjoyed with the pundits and public, it will be a hyperbole to hail them as Vāggeyakāras in Saranga Dev's sense.

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48. Deva Chaitanya: An Introduction to Indian Music, Publication Division, GOI, New Delhi, 1981, p. 101.

49. Ibid, p. 104.

No account of Indian music would be complete without evaluation of Ravindra Nath Tagore and his musical contribution towards its development. In no traditional sense Tagore can be ranked as a virtuoso of classical music, ; though he had music in his heart and in his poetic creations; nay his very 'being' was musical. His music, when heard, has the impart of being technically and aesthetically of a high order. His sense of music was superb and merits proper appreciation. Moods of words and tunes, especially an inseparable fusion there of, constitute, according to him, the soulfulness of music. He says : "The song being greet in its own wealth, why should it wait upon the words ? Rather does it begin where mere words fail. Its power lies in the region of the inexpressible; it tells us what the words can not."<sup>50</sup> Verily, indeed, all his life seems to be a song of soul heard in the depths of silence and honoured in words sung thereafter.

In one of his song-poems in 'Gitanjali' Tagore sings:

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50. Ibid, p. 127.

"The song that I came to sing remains  
unsung to this day ... ..  
The blossom has not opened; only  
the wind is sighing by....."51

He sings again :

"I know not how thou singest, my master !  
I ever listen in silent amazement .....  
The light of thy music illumines the world...  
My heart longs to join in thy song, but....."52

Tagore's search for the real music was deep and difficult. At last, his longing bore fruit and he saw the music in all its splendour. He grew mum and in silence he whispered :

"When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable"53

The whole purpose of life is to "see the unsurpassable". For, did not sage Yajna Valkya exhort his wife when he said : 'Atma Va Are Dristavyaha'

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51. Rabindra Nath Tagore: Gitanjali, Macmillan India, Delhi, 1973, No. XIII, p. 8.

52. Ibid, No. III, p. 2.

53. Ibid, No. XCVI, p. 63.

(आत्मा वा अरे दृश्यः)? Music is a divine revelation in the same sense in which the Vedas are revelations. Tagore had partaken of the ambrosial taste of fulfilment of life through music that characterizes his poems in Gitanjali.

Real Music arises from the Root of all that is. So, one has to reach the 'root' in order to be a real musician. Religion is the devotional discipline that guides and gears the devotee to reach the very root of music which is his own Being. It is the home of Divine Masters and Devotional Music. Music and religion are inseparable in their Fount Eternal which is the fulfiller of both.

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