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THE VALUES OF INDIAN MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

The value system has emerged piecemeal from what has preceded, a value system that was substantially in pace before the beginning of the shastric era and that has steadfastly resisted significant change ever since- despite the later invasions bringing Islamic ideals that differed considerably from those of Hinduism.

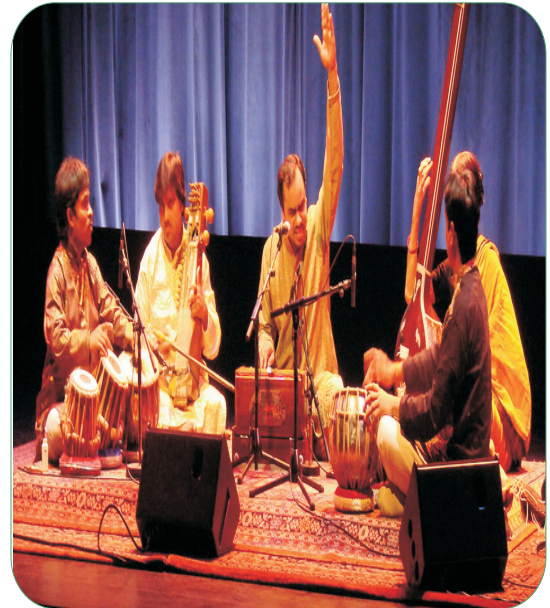
KEYWORDS: Rural, dropout youth, coping skills .

INTRODUCTION

It is argued that the system of musical values developed in close association with the values of poetry and drama and has remained in harmony with them, apart from issues that are indigenous to music. It is important to point out that in no way has the evolving scheme of musical values contradicted or undermined the larger aesthetic field within which it arose and was nourished. The most explicit link between musical aesthetics and the general philosophy of art was forged by critics of the early theater. The value system

In comparing Indian value system to the values of the West, we need to make two points, First, the consensus on values has never been seriously challenged and has at no time been subject to the waves of successive revisions that we have seen in modern European aesthetics and artistic styles. And second, Indian authors from a very early time have focused on the nature of the aesthetic experience and have shown relatively little concern for the ontological status of musical objects.

The distinctive presuppositions of Indian thought have caused certain issues either to be overlooked or to be treated in a more one-sided manner than in the West. Among these nonissues and nondebates are the purpose of



art (it is assumed that the main purpose of art is to bring delight, and as a more distant goal, liberation), the nature of artistic communication (it is a basic cultural assumption that essential substance can be transmitted in immaterial form from person to person), creativity in the arts (creation ex ni-hilo is unthinkable, so transformation of existing material is assumed), the content of art (emotional content and the suggestion of denotative meaning have been successfully explained by Indian authors), the beautiful as opposed to the sublime (a distinction that has never seemed important to Indian thinkers), art as imitation (because it is assumed that art is mimetic-or emotion, human character, and a wide range of other cultural meanings), formalism in the arts (because of the secondary role of form in the Indian worldview), and the

concept of organicism in the arts (which is again assumed).

If Indian thinkers, unlike their counterparts in the West, have not been caught up in these issues, it must be because they believed themselves to be on firm ground in following the aesthetic teachings of the early sastras. And with respect to the values embodied in the traditional music of India, this ground is easy to survey. Music, whether we have in mind a composition or, more often, an individual performance should be

1. Flawless
2. Adorned rather than plain
3. Refined, a category that includes both precision and delicacy, with negative value attached to the vulgar, harsh, rough, or careless
4. Continuous, in the form of a smooth, even, compact, connected, viscous stream of sound, with serene equilibrium as a goal and the process of creation as a model.
5. Appropriate (*aucitya*, an important category in Indian poetics) with reference to the relationship between sense, sight, and sound, or any of the cultural correlations we have explored
6. Intense, a category of value that includes the colorful, vivid, bright, radiant, illuminated, and impassioned, with negative value assigned to anything that is thin, bland, pallid, or dull
7. Plastic, in the sense that it reveals the vital force that animates all life, as demonstrated in graceful, linear configurations, with negative value attached to the static, lifeless, and awkward
8. Evocative, in that it suggests more than the explicit content, flooding the senses with meaning
9. Abundant and richly fertile, with negative value assigned to what is dry, parsimonious, fragile, strained, or limited
10. Clear in projection of the text, with crisply enunciated syllables
11. Integrated and organically unified in an orderly manner, not disordered, broken, disjointed, or chaotic
12. Comprehensive, in that the artistic contents are processed in a complete and systematic manner

It would be an interesting exercise to apply the same standards to musical works of the West, particularly those of nineteenth-century romanticism; the nineteenth century was a time when European musical values most closely resembled those of India. Frederic Chopin and Vincenzo Bellini come to mind as the composers whose music most nearly exemplifies the total set of Indian values, although few Western critics today would place them at the summit of artistic achievement. In contrast, Mozart, Beethoven, and Stravinsky would not win high ratings on the Indian criteria.

Three of the categories combine to suggest that art is valued for the manner in which it represents nature—not the appearance of nature, but the way in which nature works, pure natural process: the demands for continuity (the way of creation), plasticity (the way of life), and abundance (the way of all nature, at least under ideal circumstances).

The other important word is beauty, seemingly the most crucial of all aesthetic categories. In India, as in the West, the idea of beauty is a composite of many sub qualities, cannot be easily rendered by any single word, and often appears as the attenuated form of a more precise concept such as sweetness, radiance, adorned, apt, having good form or that which brings pleasure. It is clear that many of the traditional *gunas*-of singing, poetry, or any aspect of music-were often intended to mean little more than “beautiful” in this very general sense.

Kanti is perhaps the most popular word for beauty, with the following semantic range: beauty in general, especially female beauty; desire; decoration; loveliness; splendor; light; and bright color. It

derives from the second verbal root kam (to love, have sexual intercourse with, desire, long for), and thence from the adjective kanta (that which is desired, pleasing, lovely). This familiar cluster of meanings reminds us of the Scholastic definition of the beautiful: "That which calms the desire, by being seen or known." It is also evident that this concept of beauty is deeply rooted in typical feminine qualities, a notion unpopular in many circles today, but to gloss over it is to miss something basic in the Indian system of artistic values.

Also contributing to the general notion of beauty are a large number of other Sanskrit verbal roots that express a few fundamental ideas: to shine, be pleased, resound appear, and enjoy. Taken together they suggest an idea that plato would have endorsed-that beauty is an epiphany, a manifestation of the light of creation to the senses, bringing the taste of delight and a glimpse of the ultimate in sensible, graspable form.

CONCLUSION

As much as we must admire the systematic manner in which early musicians gradually developed their idea of music and crafted musical structures in harmony with the ideals of Indian culture, what strikes, is the single most remarkable feature of their thought is the attention they lavished on the aesthetic and qualitative properties of their music. In the light of their philosophic orientation and the nature and intensity of their cultural pre-suppositions, they could scarcely have otherwise.

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