

Music : An Infinite Ocean Of Eternal Sound – Exploring Its Background And Role

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Abstract:

Background: According to the Indian philosophy of life / line of thought, Music is one of the means of reaching the ultimate goal of Life – *Moksha* – Enlightenment / Salvation. Music means devotion towards *Naada-Brahma* – the Absolute Truth of Existence in the form of Sound. The path of realization of the Almighty through Music is called *Naada Yoga*. Music is, thus, a form of worship and Music is worshipped as a Divine Art. Musician / Artist should be / is considered as a *Saadhaka*, a devotee. The quintessence of his devoted efforts – his *Saadhanaa*, flows and resonates through and illuminates his art-work. Both, the listener as well as the artist get the benefit of rich input that goes into the art-work during the *Saadhanaa*.

The Question: The period between 1950 and 1980s is considered to be Golden Era in the history of Hindi film music. Hindi films during this period gave hundreds of memorable musical hits, which left an everlasting, positive, lingering, resonating mark on the audience. Why are most of the present day compositions devoid of such long-lasting effects ? This question arises very naturally and is often encountered. The form of popular Folk and Light Music, in different regions of the country, has also changed over the years, showing similar traits of changes as observed in case of Film Music.

Method: The present article explores the answers to these relevant, serious concerns and questions on the state / condition of present day popular Indian Music (Film Music as well as Non-Film, Popular Music), with reference to the facts related to the evolution and development of Music, the various dimensions / aspects of a musical composition – a sound sculpture, the effect of Music on various planes of human existence, viz. physical, mental and spiritual, and the overall sociological and cultural impact of such forms of popular music.

Conclusion: Every aspect, every dimension of Music – scale (*Sura*), rhythm (*Taala*), tempo (*Laya*), lyric (*Geeta*) and emotion (*Bhaava*), is complete and independent in itself. A musical composition – a sound sculpture – is a beautiful blending of each of these dimensions of Music. However, predominance of one aspect at the cost of others creates imbalance in the composition / art piece, worth avoiding. A continuous exposure to such music forms, leading to their popularity and habituation, generates definite, and unfortunately, not desirable sociological and cultural impacts, which need to be addressed with attention and concern.

Key Word: Indian Music, Indian Film Music, Indian Folk Music, Popular Indian Music, Sociological aspects of Music, Music appreciation, Aesthetics in Music

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I. INTRODUCTION : MUSIC – THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

Music is the art of sound. Musical creation is an artwork of sound – a sound sculpture. Sweet-sounding sound waves dissolve in the ears and resonate in the infinite expanses of mind and soul. Music is Universal language.

Music is the original language of Creation, the original language of Mankind. Evidence suggests that Music preceded speech, in the process of Evolution and Civilization. Researchers have found that 2/3rd of the inner ear's Cilia – thousands of tiny hair that lie on a flat plane like piano keys (Fig. 1) – resonate only at higher musical frequencies (3000 to 20000 Hz.), which points to the conclusion that at one time human beings communicated primarily through song or tone [1]. Foetuses, infants and kids spontaneously respond to sound, especially, songs / Music – they get pacified easily, learn smoothly and faster through music. This is because the singing voice has a richer frequency range and hence is more effective than speech [2]. The tonal aspects of languages relate to their musical connections. There are Tone Languages or Tonal Languages, like Mandarin Chinese or simply Mandarin - the language of government and education of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, Vietnamese, Thai and Punjabi, in which words can differ in tones (like pitches in music) in addition to consonants and vowels [3, 4]. There are some tribes in the foothills of the Himalayas that still don't have a language of words. They communicate through tones.

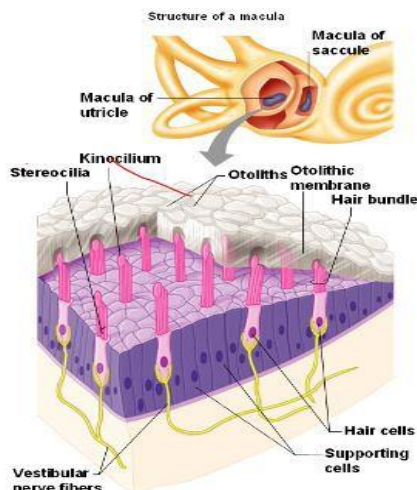


Fig. 1: Inner Ear [5]

II. THE DIMENSIONS / INGREDIENTS OF A MUSICAL COMPOSITION – A SOUND SCULPTURE

According to the classical definition of **Music** by Pandit Sharangdeva (1210–1247), in his famous book on Musicology *Sangeeta Ratnakara* (in Sanskrit), “*Geetam Vadyam Tatha Nrityam, Trayam Sangeetam Uchyate*”, which means – “Singing, Playing on Instruments and Dance, all the three (together), are Music”, i.e.

Music → Singing + Playing On Instruments + Dance.

Each of these components of Music has an independent existence, though they are inter-related and inter-dependent in musical compositions – sound sculptures. Each of them has dimensions which give them the form, the completeness, the feel of Oneness, the Unity in Diversities – the Nature of the Creator.

Sura (scale / pitch); *Taala* (rhythm) and *Laya* (tempo); *Geeta* (lyric) carved by words and fragrance of a language and *Bhaava* (emotion) which gets portrayed by the composition, in the composition : are the dimensions, the building blocks / organs of a sound sculpture – musical composition, a proper combination / blending of which make it sound pleasing and touchy, thereby making it complete and eternal (Fig. 2). *Geeta* - Lyric forms its body; *Sura* is the *Praana* – the Life force; *Laya*, the heart; tempo, the heart-beats and *Bhaava*, the soul. Imbalance in these dimensions, weakening of these building blocks, renders the sound sculpture weak, ineffective and dull. According to the *Bhaava*, the sound sculpture becomes *Satvika*, *Raajsika* or *Taamasi* in nature. Out of these three qualities of nature, viz. *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, as described in the *Bhagwada Geetaa*, whichever is prominent in the musical creation / composition, finds more intense expression in the sound sculpture [6].

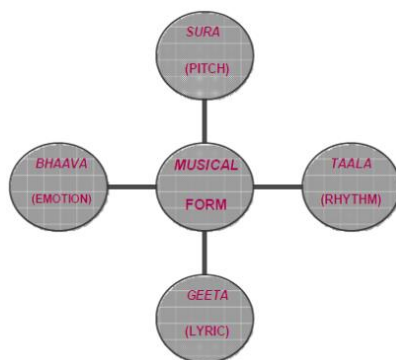


Fig. 2: Dimensions of Music [7]

III. THE GOLDEN ERA OF INDIAN FILM MUSIC TO THE PRESENT DAY MUSIC – REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

The period between 1950 and 1980s is considered to be Golden Era in the history of Hindi film music. There are minor differences in opinions observed among critics as to the duration of this period, but overall during this phase, Hindi films gave hundreds of memorable musical hits, which left an everlasting, positive, lingering, resonating mark on the audience. Why are most of the present day compositions devoid of such long-

lasting effects ? This question arises very naturally and is often encountered. The form of popular Folk and Light Music, in different regions of the country, has also changed over the years, showing similar traits of changes as observed in case of Film Music. The realization of the presence of such a void in the present musical scenario reflects awareness, which is an indication of live sensitivity – a source of hope. This void is due to simple reasons leading to weakness in the organs of the sound sculpture, the imbalance between these organs such as :

1. Carelessness towards words (lyrics) : This includes carelessness towards the pronunciation as well as the meaning of words. Words are the carriers of *Bhaava* (the emotion or the feel) of the song; hence the form as well as the features of the song gets affected.
2. Under undue influence of the so-called “modern” Music, the composition becomes excessively rhythm-oriented, making it disenchanting and mechanical / lifeless. Also the possibilities of varieties in rhythm get blocked.
3. There is predominance of *Rajasa-Tamasa* in the compositions, owing to undue, excessive influence of the so-called “modern” ideology.

Indian music as well as linguistics and grammar in Indian languages are well-developed, affluent and extensive. Most Indian languages are Sanskrit-based and are accepted as most scientifically developed – grammatically, phonetically and vocabularically [8, 9, 10, 11].

Infinite musical possibilities lounge in a variety of combinations of *Shrutis-Swaras*. *Shruti*, as per the Indian Music tradition, described in the *Sangeeta Ratnakara* by Pandit Sharangdeva, is the smallest interval of pitch that the human ear can detect. Musical sounds or notes (*Naadas*), called *Swaras* : *Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni* – are the constituent units – the basic building blocks of any song or any musical composition, in general. They are usually set to cyclic rhythm patterns called “*Taala*”. In the North-Indian Classical Music or more popularly known as Hindustani Music, total 12 *Swaras* – including sharp (*Teevra*) as well as soft (*Komala*) notes (*Swaras*) – have been established on 22 *Shrutis* in a *Saptaka* of seven basic / *Prakrut Swaras* – *Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni* that correspond with the Western C major scale – Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti – with seven whole notes in the scale and a complete octave of twelve notes [12]. Hindustani Music has 10 popular *Thaat*s (sets of *Swara* combinations which categorize the *Raagas* into a systematic classification system), while South Indian or Carnatic / Karnatic Music has 72 *Melas* (same as *Thaata* in Hindustani Music), which give rise to hundreds of *Raagas*, which have profound musical possibilities. A *Raaga* is a boundless source of musical possibilities lying in various combinations of its constituent *Swaras*. The ever-expanding galaxies of *Raagas* resonate and radiate gloriously in the world of Music. They carve, they carry and they convey ranges and ranges of multi-coloured expressions. The *Raagas* in each system of Indian classical music are rendered in a variety of musical forms (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4), such as :

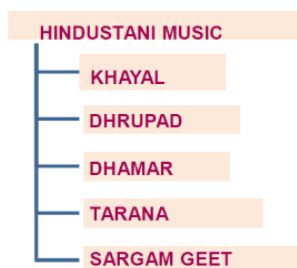


Fig. 3: Hindustani Musical Forms [7]

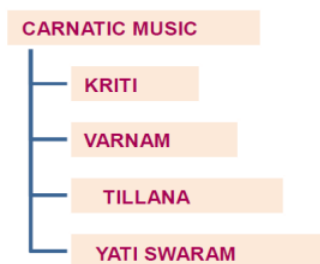


Fig. 4: Karnatic / Carnatic Musical Forms [7]

The Rainbow Land of the seven musical notes : *Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni* – stretches far and wide across the realms of entertainment to eternity. They are accompanied in their cosmic dance by *Taala, Geeta* and *Bhaava*.

In the renderings of pure classical music, the rules of *Raaga* presentation have to be adhered to. However, semi-classical and light compositions are free of such rules / bondages. Pleasant, melodious combinations of musical notes during free explorations in musical realms give wonderful compositions !

In this musical exploration, the blending of the rhythm aspect adds further flavours and varieties. *Taala*, i.e. the Rhythm – is the time aspect of Music [13]. It symbolizes the rhythms and cycles of Nature, of Creation. Along with the uniformity inherent in the *Swaras*, it signifies and dignifies boundaries, as the musical composition dissolves into infinity. Old songs were composed in variety of *Taalas*, apart from the usual *Daadaraa* of 6 *Maatraas* (beats) and *Kaaheravaa* of 4 or 8 *Maatraas*, such as those in *Rupaka* of 7 *Maatraas* (*O basanti pavan paagal*, film : *Jis Desh mein Gangaa bahati hai*, singer : Lata Mangeshkar, Music Director : Shankar Jaikishan [14]; *Tum gagan ke chandramaa ho*, film : *Sati Saavitri*, singers : Lata Mangeshkar, Manna De, Music Director : Laxmikant-Pyarelal [15]); *Jhap Taala* of 10 *Maatraas* (*Aansu bharee hein ye jeevan kee raahain*, film : *Paravarish*, singer : Mukesh, Music Director : Dattaram [16]); *Ek Taala* of 12 *Maatraas* (*Pavan diwane*, film : *Dr. Vidya*, singer : Lata Mangeshkar, Music Director : Sachin Dev Burman [17]); *Tritaala* of 16 *Maatraas* (*Poochho naa kaise meine rain bitaayi*, film : *Meri soorat teri aankhen*, singer : Manna De, Music Director : Sachin Dev Burman [18]); etc. In the film music of present times, these varieties of *Taalas* have almost vanished. There is predominance of 2, 3 or 4 beat rhythm patterns, often set in Western styles, on electronic instruments. The fact that becomes evident is, simplicity obtained at the cost of affluence and extensiveness imposes hurdles in the natural course of evolution and progress and thus is harmful, if conveniently overlooked or forgotten.

The words, forming the lyric, which embodies the sound sculpture, are derived from the vast expanses of languages. Sanskrit is the mother of most Indian languages [11]. The grammar and phonetics of these languages, which have had a systematic, scientific evolution and development – a fact accepted by scholars all over the world, are deeply inter-related, which is not the case with English and other such languages. Also, phonetics in English does not make use of as many organs of vocal mechanism and with as much variety as done in Indian languages. There are at least 12 vowels and about 35 consonants in Indian languages [10]. These days, one observes a trend of speaking Indian languages with a so-called “modern” touch, said to be influenced by “English” or “Western” inclinations, out of so-called fashion(s) or fancy. The fun behind such fancies is at the cost of harm to naturally evolved phonetic versatility.

IV. EFFECTS OF MUSIC

According to the Indian philosophy of life / line of thought, Music is one of the means of reaching the ultimate goal of Life – *Moksha* – Enlightenment / Salvation. Music means devotion towards *Naada-Brahma* – the Absolute Truth of Existence in the form of Sound. The path of realization of the Almighty through Music is called *Naada Yoga*. Music is, thus, a form of worship and Music is worshipped as a Divine Art. . Musician / Artist should be / is considered as a *Saadhaka*, a devotee. The quintessence of his devoted efforts – his *Saadhanaa*, flows though, resonates and illuminates his art-work. Both, the listener as well as the artist get the benefit of rich input that goes into the art-work during the *Saadhanaa*.

Any art-work put before the audience / viewers has a definite impact on them. Art / Music are the food for mind and soul. There are definite physical effects, as well, as proven by the studies in Music Therapy. Popular Music has definite sociological and cultural impacts, connected with its influence on the physical, mental and spiritual states of its audience. According to Karl Pribram, human beings are not (merely) logical, but musical by nature. He believed that logic merges with music. Logic is related to the word form of thought as there is debate between the spiritualism and materialism. Both these matters dissolve and unite in music, as it is more subtle and is related to proportion – to ratio. Human being is, in this sense, considered to be ‘rational’ by nature [19].

Music Therapy is found to be one of the most effective ways of controlling emotions, blood pressure and restoring the functioning of the liver. Here are some illustrations:

- Tens of thousands of years ago, sound and music were used in India, Tibet, Egypt, Athens and Rome for healing.
- The Chinese believed that music could do anything from transforming people’s characters to restore fertility of the soil [20].
- Farmers in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh in India use music for reaping richer harvest of sugarcane. The crops which are made to “listen” to staccato kind of music, which incidentally sounds very irritating to human ears, yield about 5 to 9 tonnes more compared to those not given that privilege !! Plants are found to respond to all kinds of music – classical, Western or Indipop ! And the results of acoustic treatment vary from plant to plant, depending on the music and its frequency [21].

Music Therapy has a long history dating back to the ancient Orphic school in Greece. Pythagorus, Plato and Aristotle, among others, were well aware of the prophylactic and therapeutic powers of music [22]. Pythagorus, who discovered that all music can be expressed in numbers and mathematical formulae, founded a

school that along with other things, trained students to release worry, fear, anger and sorrow through singing and playing on instruments [23]. Some more illustrations [22]:

- The Old Testament mentions music therapy where King David is said to have cured an illness by playing on the harp.
- Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, used music to cure human diseases.
- In ancient Egypt, music was used to lessen the pain of women during childbirth.
- Ibn Sina, a famous Arabic writer, has written in detail on this subject.
- In India, legend has it that Thyagaraja, the famous musician of South India, brought a dead person back to life by singing the composition *Nava Jeevana Dhaaraa* in *Raaga Bihari*.
- In 1729, a physician Richard Browne wrote the famous text *Medicina Musica*, which describes the use of music as medicine.
- Dr. Burnell has mentioned a manuscript named *Raaga Chikitsa* in the collections of Saraswati Mahal Library in Tanjore, which deals with the various *Raagas* that can be used for curing numerous ailments.

There are many such live instances of such use of music for healing even today, such as, the flute Master Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia suffered from asthma as a child and was advised by the doctor to take up the flute as an antidotal exercise – something recommended by doctors even today [21].

According to Carlyle, “Music is a kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech which leads us to the edge of the infinite and lets us for a moment gaze in that.” Music is *Naada* that generates specific vibrations that move through the medium of the atmosphere / ether and affect the human bodies. According to Raja Bhau Sontakke, a renowned singer, who runs a music institute in Bangalore, Music can be defined as universal energy assuming the form of *Raagas*. In *Kangra Ragmala*, M. S. Randhawa says that while harmony is the characteristic of Western music, Indian music is pure melody. The general term for melody in India is *Raaga* or *Raagini*. Symphonies of *Raaga* have a definite soothing effect on mind as well as the body. Repeated listening to the particular *Raaga* being chosen for a particular disease produces a network of sound vibrations. The muscles, nerves and the chakras of the affected part are contracted when one impulse is given and relaxed during the interval between two impulses. Thus, during contraction of the tissue, musical notes make the blood flow out from that particular area and in the interval, there is relaxation and a state of reduced pressure is produced in these areas. Hence, the blood from the adjacent area flows there. This process is repeated again and again and the blood flow as well as energy flow in that part is enhanced. This makes quick, fast healing energy from UEF (Universal Energy Field) to HEF (Human Energy Field) transmitted by the strokes of the different tones of raga which affects the CNS (Central Nervous System), as the roots of the auditory nerves are more widely distributed and have more connections than any other nerves in the body [22].

Music beats have a very close relationship with heartbeats. Music having 70-75 beats per minute equivalent to the normal heartbeat of 72 has a very soothing effect. Likewise, rhythms slower than 72 beats create a positive suspense on the mind and body, as the mind-body complex anticipates that the music will speed up and this restored vital energy a deep relaxation to the body. Rhythms that are faster than the heart rate excite and rejuvenate the body [22].

Hindustani classical music considers *Raagas* as depicting specific moods. *Raaga Kaafi* evokes a humid, cool, soothing and deep mood, while *Raaga Pooriya Dhanaashree* evokes a sweet, deep, heavy, cloudy and stable state of mind. *Raaga Mishra Maand* – very often heard in Rajasthani and Gujarati folk music, has a very pleasing, refreshing, light and sweet touch, while *Raaga Baageshree* arouses a feeling of darkness, stability, depth and calmness. Dr. Balaji Tambe of Maharashtra has proved through his research that *Raaga Bhoopaalee* and *Todi* give tremendous relief to patients of high blood pressure. *Raaga Ahir Bhairav*, *Maalkauns* and *Aasaawari* help cure low blood pressure. *Raaga Chadraakans* is considered very helpful in heart ailments. *Raaga Bihaag* and *Bahaar* are useful in curing insomnia [22]. The list can go on and on.

Alfred Tomatis, a Frenchman devoted to the study of the human ear and the effects of musical sounds on the brain discovered that all cranial nerves lead to the ear, which explains why soothing musical harmonics not only induce states of deep relaxation, but also directly affect breathing, the heart rate and digestion. In fact, Tomatis’ research has led him to theorize that sacred chants from various religious traditions “charge” the cerebral cortex, which sheds light on the transformative power of certain musical and vocal sounds [22]. It has been proved that the foetus responds to sound from the 24th week of pregnancy. Even in nature, the effects of music are passed on to the offspring in the foetal stage. Tomatis found out that songbirds hatched by silent foster mothers can’t sing – a finding replicated by other naturalists too [2].

Tomatis successfully treated French Actor Gerard Depardieu for stammering resulting from physiological problems arising out of deeper emotional problems, through music therapy [1]. During her Carnatic music training sessions conducted at different places across North America in the latter half of 1999, the Chennai flutist Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar “directed” her music to the wounded limb of a student and healed him [24].

Herbert Benson of Deaconess Medical Centre, Boston has studied the effects of chanting of mantras on human physiology and has found that repeating *Aum* brings about measurable changes in energy consumption, respiration rate, heartbeat, pulse and metabolic rate. An increase in alpha brain waves, associated with daydreaming and meditation has also been observed. His studies have further demonstrated that meditation and relaxation can help improve immune function and alleviate and prevent heart disease, stroke and many other chronic health problems [23].

In an extensive review of effect of music on various aspects of human health, it was found that music can improve behavioural performance in several domains, including intelligence. Scientists discovered that music is capable of modifying the brain at both functional and structural levels. Such neural changes can impact several domains, but one domain is particularly influenced by music—namely, language. Music and language seem to share special features that allow music to improve and shape language processing. Thus, music proves to be a very useful rehabilitation tool [25].

Jonathan Goldman explains the secret behind sonic healing – the heart of sonic healing is vibration. Modern Physics asserts this, as it says that all matter – down to the organs of our body – is in a constant state of whirling vibration. Everything has a unique frequency or vibration. Illness occurs when some sort of contra-vibration intrudes the normal one. Sound can be used to change these disharmonious frequencies back to normal, healthful vibrations, thereby restoring health. This physiological principle is known as entertainment – “A phenomenon in which powerful rhythmic vibrations from one source cause less powerful vibrations from another source to lock in step with the more powerful one.” External energy sources, particularly sounds, are especially powerful in affecting our internal rhythms [26].

V. THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Here I am reminded of an old story – of two friends, a florist and a fisher- woman. One day, the florist takes her fisher-woman friend home, excited at her long-awaited invitation being honoured. The fisher-woman puts her basket of fishes near the doorstep of her friend’s house and spends her day, amidst the deluge of outpouring hospitality of her loving friend. At night, however, sleep eludes her. Concerned, the florist inquires about the reason of her discomfort. The fisher-woman reveals that the fragrance of flowers in the house was irritating her. She brings her fish basket from outside, sprinkles water in it, places it on her head-side and falls asleep. The story brings forth the importance of habits, which we knowingly or unknowingly cultivate.

Like junk food there can be / is “Junk Music” which though “tastes” good, due to habit borne of continuous exposure leading to popularity, does not help human health much since it is lacking in certain important ingredients and contains an extra, unwanted input of some others. Definitely not all, but majority of popular Indian music these days suffers from this disorder and it seems almost useless to expect a sound understanding of the social, ethical and spiritual responsibility towards work in fields / professions where carelessness is popular and unfortunately accepted as a fashion. The Oriental or Indian philosophy is not the basis of such careless, childish and whimsical attitudes. The classical wisdom that independence which does not honour inter-dependence is harmful seems to be almost absent in such art-works / compositions. The effect of such music is transient like that of cold drinks or liquor.

VI. CONCLUSION

Every aspect, every dimension of Music – scale (*Sura*), rhythm (*Taala*), tempo (*Laya*), lyric (*Geeta*) and emotion (*Bhaava*), is complete and independent in itself. That is why it has been glorified in compositions like – “*Naada-saagara aparamapaara, kinahoona na paayo paara*” (The ocean of music is endless, unfathomable; nobody has ever found its shore, its depth). A musical composition – a sound sculpture – is a beautiful blending of each of these dimensions of Music. Music waves can be Nectar waves. However, predominance of one aspect at the cost of others creates imbalance in the composition / art piece, worth avoiding. A continuous exposure to such music forms, leading to their popularity and habituation, generates definite, and unfortunately, not desirable sociological and cultural impacts, which need to be addressed with attention and concern.

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