

Music — The powerful medium of communication

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IN the entire range of knowledge, art or science, music stands not only as the oldest but also as the most universal in character and sensual in its appeal. Hence, the appeal of music is more intellectual and abstract than in the other fine arts.

Communications are to society and civilization like what nervous system is to man. A good oration or speech by great speakers creates an indelible impression on man's mind. But music makes man, the most primitive savage as well as the most civilised, old and young, beast and reptile, bird and fish respond.

Music is older than language. Long before life arose on earth, nature provided the crude basis of music. The murmur of running waters, the whistle of the wind, the hiss of the flame, the rumble of the earth and the thunder of the sky constituted the rudiments of sound from which speech no less than music developed.

Music stands as the most ethereal of all the fine arts. It does not depend upon any material medium for expression. It is commonly asserted that every art tends towards music. It is the ideal in the sense that all attempts to create beauty are governed by principles that are derived from music. We admire and appreciate a picture, statue, an exquisite piece of sculpture or painting and describe their merits of colour, form or design in terms of rhythm and harmony.

Judged from the innumerable qualities of immemorial antiquity, universality of appeal, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and spiritual

influence, educative, social and unifying virtues curative and all conquering powers and ethereal and ideal character, the glory and uniqueness of music remains unsurpassed for ever.

Ancients - Egyptians - considered music as 'divine' and believed that the universe was created out of music. Mexican Folklore Tezcatlipoca is said to have stolen music from the Sun - God and brought it down to the earth similar to Prometheus having brought fire from heaven. Treatise on Vedas discover 'Sama Veda' as repository of music. The mighty king Ravana, of the great epic of "The Ramayana" is said to have acquired great physical power from Lord Siva, whom he had pleased by playing 'Sama Veda' on his 'Veena'. Saints like Thyagaraja, Muthuswamy Dikshithar, Shyama Sastri, Tulsidas, Kabir, Meerabai and a host of others could succeed in propagating bhakthi - devotion to god - and elevate mankind by their musical compositions.

The early part of this century witnessed the emergence of Subramania Bharthi - a poet par excellence and great freedom-fighter. He too had implicit faith in communicating to the masses through the medium of songs which he used to sing extempore. Since Bharthi's songs couched in easy and understandable style, that even a child could easily follow their meaning. Yet there is obtruse philosophy in every song explained in its simplest form.

From time immemorial and even to-day Indian mothers sing lullaby in Raga 'Nilambari' to make their babies sleep. We sing

while we plough, harvest, work, pray and to any other type of activity. Even the beggars who beg on the streets know the efficacy of song. There is a song for the occasion when a child is born in Raga Sahana. At the name christening ceremonies 'Yadukula Khamboji' is sung and on wedding occasions Dharbar, Bilahari and their kindred and while at dawn of the day Bhoopalam is resorted to; even at death the wailings embrace Raga Muhari. Thus music occupies an important place in home and school, in temples, churches, theaters, in processions and on pilgrimages. Even our present day politicians have not failed to recognise that music is one of the powerful tools in their armoury of propaganda to catch votes. All these cases lead us to the inescapable truth that music is a way of communication as a part of our life.

There is a science of music, but music is not a science. Nor is it an imitative art. It is a language. Words at first were rather sung than spoken and sentences were rhythmical. The human language of speech bears the same relation to the human language of songs as the varied bark of the civilised dog to its sonorous howl. There seems little in common between the lady who plays Veena or the man at the piano and the dog which chimes in with jaws opened and nose upraised, yet each is making use of the primitive language of its race; the wild dog can only howl, the wild man can only sing.

Just as the articulate or conventional speech has been developed into rich and varied tongues, by means of which abstract ideas and delicate emotions can be expressed in appropriate terms, so the inarticulate or musical speech - the true, the primitive language of our race - has been developed with the aid of instruments into a rich and varied language of sound in which poems can be composed. To cite a few examples, are the flute, veena, viola, nageswaram, tabla etc.

When we listen to the sublime and mournful sonatas of Beethoven or to the tender melodies of Bellini or to the shehanai of Bismillah Khan

or to the sitar of Pandit Ravi Shankar or to the tabla of Alla Rakha, or to the violin by Yehudhi Menuhin or to the flute by Mali or to Nagaswaram by T. N. Rajaratnam, we fall into a trance; the brain burns and swells; its doors fly open; the mind sweeps forth into an unknown world where all is dim, dusky, unutterably vast; gigantic ideas pass before us; we attempt to sieze them; to make them our own, but they vanish like shadows in our arms. And then, as the music becomes soft and low, the mind returns and nestles to the heart; the senses are steeped in languor; the eyes filled with tears; the memories of the past take form, and a voluptuous sadness permeates the soul - sweet as the sorrow of romantic youth when the real bitterness of life was yet unknown.

Music is a civilising and unifying force. It is possible for us to enjoy a symphony of Beethoven as it is for the Westerner to appreciate 'Bhavanut' even in the absence of knowledge of the alien system. Where language divides, Music unites. The southerner loves the 'Bhairavi' of the northerner quite as much as the latter, the 'Khamboji' of the former. Even the bigotry of race and religion is liquidated by sangita.

Music has curative powers. Experiments have proved that certain modes of classical music, apart from their soothing effect in general, have definite therapeutic values. The transcendal value of music lies in its infinite power to spirtualise the common man.

Every one of us is fully made aware of the universality of music in its appeal irrespective of language or caste or creed. Keats while stressing on the endurance of all great art, says in his 'Ode on a Gracecian urn'.

'For ever warm and still to be enjoyed
For ever panting and for ever young'.

Music has, more than any other art, 'the infinite capacity to express to thousands of listeners, in a thousand different accents, in an animate but irresponsible manner, what will be otherwise incommunicable. ●