

CHAPTER 13

The Aesthetics of Music

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INTRODUCTION

When we speak of 'art' with any serious intent, we think of literature, music, theatre, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture and the like, which may be called the 'high' arts—'high' because they are thought of as expressions of a seeking akin to that of knowledge or the spirit. But what makes them 'high', and in what sense? This is an essay in exploring this question, especially with music in mind, by distinguishing the 'high' arts from what may be called the arts of *bhoga* or pure sense-pleasure. Such a way of looking at the arts is not usual, but I think it can lead to interesting insights. Indeed, one can discern such a method in the Indian thinking about *rasa*, the 'master' or representative concept defining the aesthetic experience in India. I take this approach in my own way, though stepping away from it when it comes to music.

Rasa may be understood as the self-consciousness of emotion from within emotion itself, akin to the self-consciousness of thought within the act of thinking. In music, an abstract, non-representational art, emotions are dissociated from situations where they occur in ordinary experience and where we know and name them. Thus in speaking of music, we can perhaps speak of a realm where pure feelings become self-aware, self-revealing and self-exploratory.

I

The use of the word 'aesthetics' in the context of our thinking about the arts is relatively new in English; it seemed to have acquired currency, after resistance and hesitation, only in the middle of the nineteenth century. However, the idea of *aesthesis* as opposed to *phusis* seems old, and understandably so. To put it simply and perhaps roughly, the idea of *aesthesis* is the apprehension, perception or grasping of an object through the senses, whereas the notion of *phusis* concerns the object as it is in itself. The opposition in thought of what things are in themselves and the way they are presented to us by our

senses has raised deep and perennial questions—and answers—regarding our knowledge of the world, and will remain with us. It is rooted in the very nature of knowledge, with its self-aware yet inseparable antithesis in the very act of knowing between subject and object.

But *aesthesis* itself is a rich area of experience and thought. Clearly, our senses are not only the means of knowing things, but also of 'tasting' them: enjoying, relishing, taking pleasure in them; and it is not surprising that the use of the word 'taste' has been associated with the idea of aesthetics ever since it came into use. The idea of 'taste' calls to mind the Sanskrit term *āsvāda*, which has been much used in India in thinking about the arts. The senses, clearly, have a dual thrust: on the one hand their relation with objects is associated with knowing, but on the other hand, they are also the means of taking pleasure in them, in enjoying them: in other words, 'tasting' them. We have an opposition here that can be most evocatively put as the opposition between *jñāna* and *bhoga*—the well-known contrasting terms. The contrast is deep, since it is believed that *jñāna* and *bhoga* take radically different paths: if we have to have *jñāna*, we must rid ourselves of *bhoga*, since *bhoga* immerses us in an object and obliterates the self-conscious distancing from the object needed for the knowing consciousness. We get 'drowned' or 'lost' in the object, and cannot stand apart from it in order to know it. Likewise, the advice for those who would enjoy is to 'let go' and lose themselves in the object or in the act of enjoyment, and not withdraw from it.

Yet *bhoga* is also an art; it has its discernments, its skills, involving judgement and knowledge. This is revealed in its traditions and its organized *śāstras*. Indeed, this is an important trait of all 'cultured' living and civilizations. Obviously, then, *bhoga* is not disconnected from *jñāna*. One has to be a knowledgeable *bhogī* in order to get more out of *bhoga*. Here there is a self-consciousness of its own kind that is aware of the subject and object as in knowing, self-consciousness, which moulds them both in ways that could lead and nurture them for a greater and richer *bhoga*. That is why arts such as the culinary and that of perfumery, not to speak of the art of love-making, seek ways and means to prepare both object and subject for a greater mutuality in the interest of a more fulfilling *bhoga*.

Tradition has preserved a list of 'cultured', pleasure-giving arts: the sixty-four *kalā-s* as they were called. These included the arts of cooking and perfumery, and also such arts as combined visual with aromatic pleasure—as in the art of weaving garlands. They were, as we can imagine, associated with *vinoda* or refined enjoyment or refined living in general. We can call them the arts of *aesthesis*. Such arts are even cultivated today and the word 'art' is used for them, as well. But when we speak of the arts with any serious purport, these are not what we mean. The question that I would like to ask is: what is the difference? To ask this question is, I think, one way of leading ourselves towards an understanding of the aesthetics of arts such as music, to which I will make an approach in my own manner. One usually does not begin with such a question; indeed it is a question considered redundant, for 'art' in serious discourse is assumed to be categorically elevated above *bhoga*. In talking of 'aesthetics' only certain 'high' arts come to mind—a limitation or selectivity is at work that marks out the field at the outset. My intention is not to deny a 'higher' status to arts such as music, painting, sculpture, literature and the like, but I have deliberately chosen to extend the arena in order to

explore it in my own way and discern the difference between the arts of *bhoga*, and those of a 'higher' or 'inner' purport. One reason is that a *sensuous* quality is not denied in the higher arts; indeed it is cherished and cultivated, even in an art such as literature that has a medium quite distinct from that of any other art, since word or language is inseparable from meaning, which is conceptual, not sensual. It is not surprising that the list of *kalā-s* from the *Kāmasūtra* includes literature, theatre, music and painting and such 'high' arts along with cooking, perfumery and the like. I say this in order to emphasize the fact of a continuum between *bhoga* and the more elevated appeal of the higher arts.

A differentiation is made between art and craft with a somewhat similar purpose; the intent of this distinction, too, is to mark the 'higher' and 'lower' among the arts (and also, one might point out, to speak of a continuum)—but the focus is quite different. Craft is a category that is repetitive, unimaginative, lacking in originality or creativity, and also thus in individuality. Art is the opposite. But such a distinction cannot discriminate between what I have called the *kalā-s* of *bhoga* and their more elevated sisters. Take the art of cooking: the distinction between a great cook and an ordinary one can be summed up with the same adjectives as those used for art as distinguished from craft—a great cook is non-repetitive, imaginative, original, creative, individualist, etc., just like a great musician. But this does not help us distinguish between cooking and music, which lie, we feel, at different altitudes as art.

What, in truth, distinguishes for us the higher arts from the arts of mere *bhoga* is the fact that the senses here are a means to something more meaningful and thus to be valued above *bhoga*, just as in *jñāna*, which moves from the sensuous to the conceptual, a realm of reason, freedom and truth. This brings the arts—as a human seeking parallel in significance—to *jñāna*, and this is what accords them a value above *bhoga*. It is not that *bhoga* is not considered an end in itself like *jñāna*, yet *bhoga* as an end in itself fails obviously to satisfy the higher seeking of the human spirit: *bhogāḥ na bhuktāḥ vāyameva bhuktāḥ*

Nevertheless, art is radically different from *jñāna* in that it relates to the subject rather than to the object. But the subject here is not a seeker of mere *bhoga*. So, how do we understand and formulate this seeking, which is different from that of *jñāna* but felt to be of a similar order? The concept of 'taste', or what might in general be termed 'aesthetic' as experience relating to 'taste', *āsvāda* or mere enjoyment of any kind, seems clearly unsatisfactory here—since like *bhoga* it includes all the *kalā-s*, making no distinction between a higher and a more meaningful art and a lower one. What we need is to discriminate *between* the *kalā-s*: between, for example, the culinary arts and music and, say, theatre. Such a path of discrimination is not usually taken in thinking about the arts in the West, as far as I know. But it can be discerned in the Indian thinking, or so I feel. I will try and take this path, travelling it in my own way, and moving away from it in order to speak of my own understanding of the aesthetics of music.

II

An interesting distinction may be made here between the senses themselves. Not all the senses relate to their objects in the same manner. It is worthy of note that the 'higher'

arts relate only to two senses—the eye and the ear. The arts of the other senses hardly rise above the level of purely sensuous *bhoga*. In a kind of parenthesis it might be remarked here that some early Indian thinkers, who were greatly interested in the difference between the perception of the different senses, divided them into two categories: the *prāpyakāri* and the *aprāpyakāri*, terms that may be understood as separating the senses into those that grasp the object directly and those that keep it at a distance.¹ In the context of knowledge, it is doubtful if such a distinction is really significant, for knowledge makes abstractions, denuding the object of the qualities that are considered merely sensuous, such as taste, feel or the like, looking for a 'physical object' that lies beyond the senses. In the physical sciences, the senses serve as indexes embedded in an elaborate and complex theoretical system where mathematics, working with purely non-sensuous 'things' such as numbers, plays a much more important role than the perception of the senses. But in the context of the arts, where the perceived sense-qualities are of central importance, the distinction of *prāpyakāri* and *aprāpyakāri* should attract attention. It is remarkable that the 'higher' arts are all related to the eye and the ear, senses that were distinguished from the others as *aprāpyakāri*. These senses seem naturally to allow a higher sensibility to rise above the avid sensuousness of *bhoga* and make room for the higher arts. The arts such as painting, sculpture, architecture, dance, music and theatre (which is an art both for the eye and the ear), seem to rise naturally into a higher realm of awareness. I have deliberately avoided naming literature here, for its medium, language, consists of words, which are obviously conceptual: they are given, right at the outset, as symbols, abstract and universal in purport. Language, thus, is indifferent to seeing and hearing: seeing a word as in a written script, or hearing it, both lead to a realm of meaning that is non-sensuous. Indeed, the 'high' arts can all be said to give a similar symbolic aspect to their creations. The ear, it may be further remarked, is never in touch with an object even distantly in an *aprāpyakāri* sense, for sound is not a quality of objects. *Svara-s*, or tones, may be said to be the objects of the ear; they may be termed felt symbols with which we are able to make music: the universal relations of harmony that mark the *svāra-s* are part of a perception that is collective and non-sensuous; this combined with the fact that they are unique objects on their own, independent of the 'concreteness' that other objects have, renders them similar to numbers, and no wonder many have felt a similarity between music and mathematics. And yet *svāra-s* also have an intensely sense-felt quality and so can be appropriately called 'felt symbols'.

Above, I named theatre in relation to the art of cooking. This has been done with a specific intention. As is well known, the Indian concept that distinguishes aesthetic experience from others is *rasa*. What may not be so well known is that the context in which the concept is introduced is that of theatre and that the idea of *rasa* is enunciated through a parallel with the art of cooking. It was in an attempt to articulate the aesthetics of theatre that Bharata first enunciated the concept of *rasa*. What is interesting is that the concept of *rasa* for Bharata had an intimate connection with the idea of *rasa* in cooking. He connects the two, seeking obviously to formulate the notion of *rasa* in theatre in terms of *rasa* in 'tasting' the things we eat. *Rasa* in cooking has to do with the different 'feels' or '*āsvāda-s*' that the palate naturally possesses. Palatal *rasa-s* had been classified into six natural kinds, obviously before Bharata, and probably in an organized attempt by

what may have been the *Śāstra*-s of cooking. We find a 'considered' and an 'established' list in Bharata of the six basic tastes: *madhura* (sweet), *amla* (sour), *tikta* (bitter) etc. (the list is still well known and I need not repeat it). Bharata transfers this notion of *rasa* to theatre and speaks of theatre as having eight (or nine) *rasa*-s of its own. The six *rasa*-s of cooking were understood as the basic 'raw experiences' of the palate, which are clearly distinguishable in our sense-experience of tasting things. This analytical distinction can be compared, somewhat, to what we think of as basic colours, seen in the rainbow or the prism. They are the ground tastes—or simple, natural 'feels' one might say—inherent in the palate, which the culinary imagination seeks to transform and 'recreate' into wholes of its own device for a satisfying, refined, opulent *bhoga*—a sought-for richer pleasure—opening up the possibilities of the six natural *rasa*-s and also leading them into new innovative and 'richer' directions through the process of cooking, just as the painter transforms natural colours and recreates them on his canvas, constructing wholes of his own making. Herein lies the *art* of cooking: what it seeks is to build creatively on given raw material, with expertise in processing the material through skill and tasteful judgement, combining different eatables, flavouring them with spices and cooking them with the use of methods such as roasting, grilling, baking, boiling, frying etc. A fine-tuned, creative culinary judgement can, with such treatment, transcreate the given *rasa*-s and lead them into new directions, opening new, more well-rounded areas of taste.

In Bharata's view, what the theatre does is similar—it does something parallel with human emotions. It recreates what might be called given emotional states (*bhāva*-s), present in human experience and expressed in the ordinary situations of life, by representing them in a context of its own making, that is, the theatre. Thus, theatre as art transforms the world of given emotions into an imaginatively created world of its own, where emotional wholes can be created at will. This transfigures the raw material of ordinary emotions that we know from the normal experience of life, into *rasa*—into an emotive state in which we can now savour and 'taste' the emotions. For this purpose theatre (like cooking) uses devices of its own, transforming 'ordinary', given emotional circumstances into situations of its own making, through appropriate imaginative narratives, presenting them with devices of its own, such as acting spiced with the use of music, vividly accented action, affectively intoned diction, and the like. It can, more importantly, combine *bhāva*-s—given human emotional states—in its own creative ways to put together and synchronize given 'raw' emotions into wholes of its own making and create total felt milieus that are not ordinarily present.

A question naturally comes up here: what are the 'given' emotions? Classifying natural human emotional states is a matter much more complex than classifying given palatal tastes (the six primary *rasa*-s) or even the given basic colours. But Bharata has done so—his is perhaps the first attempted list of its kind (we need not go into its merits or shortcomings here). He speaks of forty-nine *bhāva*-s or emotions, which he understands as emotional states present in different kinds of human situations or contexts (that theatre recreates on the stage). Of these emotions, he considered eight as basic or primary: *rati* (love), *bhaya* (fear), *krodha* (anger) etc. I will not enter into the list here but assume it to be known. He considered these primary *bhāva*-s as *sthāyī* or more stable, more 'underlying' *bhāva*-s. Other *bhāva*-s, he called *vyabhicāri*-s or less stable *bhāva*-s,

which could be appropriately combined with a *sthāyī* to reinforce, accentuate and enrich it: they are 'parts' of *sthāyī bhāva-s*, travelling in and out of them—such as jealousy in love. Bharata's understanding of *bhāva-s*—and thus of man's 'natural' emotional life itself—is, as we can see in his analysis, clearly coloured through his understanding of theatre and geared towards the creating of the kind of theatrical contexts he had in mind. His understanding is clearly dependent on the notion that in theatre the 'stable' and the 'unstable' *bhāva-s* could be combined with deliberate art in order to reinforce a 'stable' *bhāva*, such as *rati* or love. This when combined with music, etc., according to Bharata, led to a transformation and recreation of emotions that could transfigure them from the raw given into a savoured state or *rasa*. Not only love or *rati*, but even fearful *bhaya* or terrifying *krodha*, indeed even horrid *jugupsā*, that is, hateful horror (another *sthāyī bhāva*), could be thus brought to a condition where it could be savoured.

Obviously, we have a distinction here between experiencing an emotion and savouring it—a fact more immediately clear perhaps in the case of *bhaya*, *krodha*, *jugupsā* etc. But even in *rati*, the joy or ecstasy or even bliss is not of savouring the emotion but flowing with it, being overpowered by it. Savouring needs a distancing, making the one who savours a spectator, an observer, a non-participant. And yet if he is savouring, he is an involved onlooker—the observation is not purely intellectual, but a felt one. It can be called emotion observed with the eye of emotion. This is *rasa*.

But I am anticipating and making a move in the direction which the thinking about *rasa* took much after Bharata. But a movement away from Bharata is inherent in his own formulation since equating theatre with the art of cooking cannot lead thought towards any genuine and deep understanding of the art of theatre. We have only to ask the question: can the enjoyment we get out of theatre be termed *bhoga*? There is *āsvāda*, certainly, or there will be no onlookers, but the *āsvāda* is obviously not sensuous. There can even be a serious hesitation in using the word *āsvāda* or 'enjoyment' when it comes to an art like theatre—for such a word seems to belittle the art. There is, thus, a grave uneasiness with the *rasa*-theory today and the major reason is the idea of *āsvāda*, which it so deeply associates with the higher arts. The gratification we receive from the higher arts is felt to have a kinship with *jñāna* and not *bhoga*.

And yet the association of the emotions with the higher arts cannot be disputed. Emotions, evidently, are not sensuous things. But what are they? They certainly seem to have a realm of their own that is as broad and open as that of the intellect. And yet both *jñāna* and *dharma* (the moral consciousness) treat them as low and as obstacles to higher pursuits. That is why they are often delegated to that in us which is considered lower and even physical. Nevertheless, it is almost a truism to say that the arts value them and are concerned with them intensely and seriously. In India, *rasa* was an independent *puruṣārtha*, a major end in itself, and neither art nor thinking about the arts, especially with the *rasa*-theorists whose concerns centred on the emotions, was to be taken lightly. A deeper look into this line of thought is interesting in the context of distinguishing the higher arts from the arts of *bhoga*.

The *rasa*-theory, as I said above, takes off from Bharata, but moves later in a more thoughtful and meaningful direction, away from *bhoga*, though bonded yet to the idea of *āsvāda*. And we must not forget here that the *āsvāda* element in art, even the 'higher' arts, can hardly be denied, however much we may denigrate it; indeed, we cherish the sensuous

quality of art without which it would not be complete, even as we affirm its higher reaches. But if so, the question becomes: what is it that makes it closer in value to *jñāna* than to *bhoga*? To state the answer simply and plainly: *jñāna* is closely related to thought and what the *rasa*-theory shows is that artistic activity reveals a self-reflexivity similar to thought. Thought is obviously self-aware: we are aware of thinking in the very act of thought—that is how a dialectical movement is possible in the process. But that our emotional nature can also be similarly self-reflexive, is not so obvious. Emotions are felt, on the contrary, to carry us away from self-reflection. We think with concepts that are abstract and universal, making the world of thought trans-personal as well as inter-personal in the universal life of reason. This is what links thought to objectivity and, thus, to *jñāna*. This is also the reason why thought can be self-reflective, because self-reflection needs a realm that is free from subjectivity, the limitations of our individuality and its closed concerns. Emotions are felt to move in just the opposite direction—they draw us into our limited self-centred personal cell.

The *rasa*-theory implies that this is not necessarily so, that art is possible only because the possibility of self-reflection can extend to our emotional self too (which, I think, can be more appropriately called the 'feeling' self). It is a quality of self-reflection inherent in the feeling self and is not thought reflecting on feeling, which is quite a different activity. Feelings, when they are presented to us as objects of knowledge or as movements within us that have to be suppressed or transformed or acted upon in some way or the other, can lead into disciplines or directions of understanding such as psychology, yoga, the moral endeavour and the like. But in the experience of *rasa*, feeling looking upon itself remains in the feeling-mode. This may even be called the self-understanding of feeling, for it is a self-conscious rational activity and shares in the universality and 'knowingness' of such activity, without being in the objective mode. Yet it is not subjective in a derogatory sense. It is, rather, a self-understanding of the subject that can be expressed in the inter-subjective universality of art, which can be said to create symbolic concept-like forms out of the medium it uses—that is why we speak of the arts as having a language of their own. Abhinavagupta, a major and profound thinker concerned with theorizing about *rasa*, speaks of art as capable of universalizing emotions—*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*—that renders it possible for them to be transformed into *rasa*.

It is perhaps not immediately simple to take hold of this aspect of the theory of *rasa*, which, however, lies at its core. It may be interesting, therefore, to relate a story that is current in the oral tradition of introducing students to the idea.

There was, the story goes, an old woman in a village, who lived alone and never attended common village activities or functions. But one day when the *Rāmāilā* was going on, she came along to watch it. The episode being enacted was that of the abduction of *Sītā* by *Rāvaṇa*. As *Rāvaṇa* was forcibly carrying the helpless young *Sītā* away, the old woman could see that everyone in the audience was unhappy and crying, including the stout young men of the village, but no one was *doing* anything about the matter. She could not control herself and cried out: 'What is wrong with you people? You are just watching and crying, but why do you not do something to save the girl from that rogue—after all there are so many of you!' One can imagine what happened at this point. The old woman was made to sit down quietly or sent away. No one did anything about

what was happening on the stage, though they all condemned the abduction, were greatly unhappy, even crying pathetically with grief. And yet they relished the experience. What kind of emotion was the audience having? It was certainly pathos and grief, but a 'savoured' pathos and grief, different, clearly, from that of the naive old woman whom the emotion moved in a predictable, but (at the moment) unwonted manner. It was, the *rasa*-theorist says, an emotion that was 'perceived' with the eye of our emotional self through the distancing made possible by the universal language of the art of theatre. It was not an emotion that was the personal emotion of anyone present; it 'belonged' to none: neither the actors, nor the audience, or even the script-writer(s), and yet it could be empathized with by each of them. It was, in other words, a *sādhāraṇīkṛta* emotion, the *karuṇa rasa*, and not ordinary pathos, as it was for the old woman.

We can imagine other such situations. Suppose that I visit the home of a couple who are close friends of mine, and hear them from the door shouting at each other with violent anger, something they do not usually do. I would, it is very likely, be much alarmed and rush in to be able to help in some way and perhaps prevent something untoward taking place; or I might choose to move away not wanting to disturb or interfere, or call for help or do some such thing. But if I were to go in and learn that they were rehearsing a play, my whole attitude—indeed, my whole 'seeing'—will be transformed. It will now be like watching the *Rāmāilā*, even perhaps as a critic; but the point is that my emotional or feeling self will play a crucial role in the act of watching. I will, in other words, be a 'feeling' observer sensitive to the emotions being enacted and in the play of their inter-relations, watching, so to speak, with an eye of emotion. My observation will not be purely intellectual, yet on a level with the self-awareness that is present in intellectual apprehension. The self-awareness here is awareness clearly akin to knowledge, but unlike knowledge, it is not in the objective mode. Being rooted in my emotional self, I remain in a subjective mode, and yet there is a kind of knowledge involved here in the sense that I know the subject through an artistic presentation that recreates the emotionality of the subject for all to see and feel. The awareness can perhaps be termed a self-awareness of our subjective self, where the subjectivity of the felt emotion no longer relates to a personal or individual 'I' or 'me' but is presented in a theatrical form, which is akin to an 'idea' in the realm of feeling just as concepts are in the realm of thought, common to all 'I' and 'me'. It is for this reason, Abhinavagupta argues, that even an unpleasant emotion like horror or fear can become something that can be 'savoured', because it becomes impersonal and does not frighten or agitate me as it otherwise would. It is turned into an idea, yet an idea that I can *feel*.

One can now more seriously question whether it is really relevant to speak of 'savouring' *rasa*. Ideas are not savoured. The stress on *āsvāda* is certainly overdone by the *rasa*-theorists. The essential insight does not concern savouring but a self-seeing: the self-awareness within our feeling-self expressed through the idea-like universality of art, which represents the world of feelings through its own language-like symbolic forms that impersonalize the subject-self for the eye of the subject. It is, one might add, a unique way of seeing—one where the subject looks at itself in its own felt subjective being without turning itself into an object. This is what makes art not only distinct from knowledge in the ordinary sense, but also, paradoxically, makes it difficult for us to realize the 'knowing' nature of art. This paradox, indeed, seems to lie at the very heart

of the *rasa*-theory, which on the one hand speaks of the *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* or universalization of feelings in the process of art-apprehension and yet on the other hand, relates this *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* not to a unique kind of *jñāna* as it should, but to *āsvāda* or *bhoga* (one reason for this is obviously the reluctance to break away from the 'hallowed' memory of Bharata). The rendering of feelings as *sādhāraṇīkṛta*, or 'impersonal universals', the theory says, removes those obstacles that bar us from savouring them, since it removes them from the stress and demands of their immediacy, which either lead to action or to other mental states that are part of the flow of every-day experience, not allowing a feeling to be able to stand on its own. But *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is a normal everyday affair as we see in the use of concepts. Concepts are as *sādhāraṇīkṛta* as *bhāva*-s presented in art. The very use of language involves *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, without which our every-day experience is unimaginable. What is meant then, in the case of art, is not just *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, but one in which the *sādhāraṇīkṛta* feeling does not become a conceptualized object in the usual sense (as it does in merely describing it, or analysing it psychologically), remaining in the feeling-domain instead. This domain, one might add, reaches out beyond what we usually think of as emotions and extends to the 'felt' realm of our acting-self and the thinking self. Arts such as theatre or the novel may be said to present human action and thought in a mode where we can perceive the subjective-feel of our acting and thinking selves. However, I will not elaborate on this because I want to talk about music and not theatre or the novel.

III

That music is concerned with our feeling-self is more obvious than in the other arts. Music on its own is indeed quite unrelated to action and thought. We find it so related in theatre (or the film), but in such cases music is not on its own but is an accompanying art in the service of a very different kind of presentation, a presentation that, in fact, represents a given world outside itself. On its own, music is an abstract art where there is no distinction between form and content. Abhinavagupta has called it *sva-pratiṣṭha* or a self-contained art radically different from theatre. How then is music as an art related to feelings or emotions? Our feeling-self is normally presented to us in the context of action and thought. Feelings are part of familiar human living and we usually cannot divorce them from such a context. Indeed, the very names we give to feelings—love, fear, compassion and the like—are contextual. Arts like the theatre or the novel present them contextually, and this is how we recognize them, a trait that is retained in their transformation into *rasa*.

To represent is an essential characteristic of the very medium of theatre or the novel—just as it is that of a great deal of painting or sculpture as well. Music is just the opposite. Contrast *svara* as a medium with those of painting and sculpture, for example. Lines, colours and volumes *can* be used to create non-representational form—as they do today in forms that are *sva-pratiṣṭha*. But they can be used to represent something outside themselves, as has been usual. Word as a medium is by its very nature divided into sound and sense—*vācya* and *vācaka* and is representational. But *svara* has no *vācya-vācaka bhāva*; it is capable of becoming what I have called 'a felt symbol' on its own

without picturing or representing things of the outside world like the other mediums can do. We can also see that unlike plastic mediums, music is not a 'thing' but a set of given, universal relations between pitches, grounded in a harmonic principle. The principle has an inner flexibility, and *svara-s* can exist in a state of tension with it. And so, what a *svara* is has remained an open question in the history of music in India (and elsewhere). In this, *svara-s* are like numbers which are understood as existing on their own in a network of 'given' inter-relations (though we also find that like a *svara*, what a number is remains an open question and new numbers are added everyday to those given, making the realm more complex). This quality of 'existing on their own' (however it may be construed) gives both *svara-s* and numbers their universality. In addition, *svara-s* have a strong natural affinity with our feeling-self, which makes them, unlike numbers, an appropriate medium for art.

But the question still remains: being unlike other mediums, in what way does music relate to feelings? It is certainly not like theatre or the novel, which can pick out emotional contexts from the human world and re-weave them with their own imaginative vision. Music cannot do that (unless combined with another art such as theatre or poetry). Consequently, we cannot speak of *rasa* here if we understand the emotions as essentially contextual, as the tradition of thinking emanating from Bharata has made us believe. Interestingly, Bharata and later, Abhinavagupta seem to have been aware of the problem that the aesthetics of a non-representational *sva-pratiṣṭha* art cannot be the same as that of a representational art. This is a significant aspect of the history of thought regarding the arts in India, though little attention has been given to it; we have become used to thinking that the notion of abstraction and the non-dependence of artistic imagination on some kind of representation of the outside world is a modern Western notion. But I will not discuss here the notion of abstraction as it developed in India.

Let us go back to *rasa*. We have seen that the central concern of the concept is to understand the relation between art and emotion, and its core insight is that art enables our emotional self to reflect upon itself in freedom and imagination. Its limitation is that, making theatre its paradigm, it understands emotions in contextual terms. This is a limitation it refuses to give up. But we need not be so limited. We need not even be limited by the term '*rasa*', because it has associations accumulated over the ages. What is important is to realize that though music is concerned with feelings or emotions, it is not so concerned with them in the usual sense in which we understand emotions. For one, emotions in music cannot be named, and hence 'recognized' in the usual sense. Like the medium itself, the feelings here are felt as 'abstract' and to call them 'emotions' thus seems inappropriate. The felt world expressed through music seems to relate to a stratum of our felt-self that underlies what we recognize and name as emotions, named as in the *sthāyī-bhāva-s*. This comes out pointedly when we consider how musical movements or pieces relate to theatrical situations. The same music can appropriately accompany very different emotional or *bhāva*-situations—and, significantly, that accompanying piece when heard on its own, need not seem related to any particular *bhāva*-situation at all.

In order to try and understand the nature of the felt-world evoked through music, we can, I think, look at the different 'tones' or 'nuances' that the same emotion can have. Take anger, for instance. One can speak of a 'mild' or 'virulent' anger or of such other

'tonal' differences within the emotion, and this is true of other emotions or *bhāva*-s, too. Bharata speaks of such an underlying stratum of feeling in his own way: he not only groups *sthāyī* and *sañcārī bhāva*-s into wholes that give rise to *rasa* in a theatrical context, he goes beyond. He speaks of a felt tonal ground common to or shared by different *rasa*-s: thus Bharata, significantly, groups together *karuṇa*, *śṛṅgāra* and *hāsya* as sharing the same 'felt ground' of being *sukumāra* ('delicate', 'fragile', 'graceful', etc.), in contrast to *vīra*, *bhayānaka*, *raudra*, which are felt to be *uddhata* or 'strong', 'virulent' or 'forceful' in nature. These, clearly, are 'feels' underlying what we think of as emotional or *bhāva*-states, rather than emotions themselves—and indicate that different emotions can share the same feel or tone. It is, indeed, this fact that makes it possible for the same music to meaningfully accompany and 'buttress' different *rasa*-situations in film and theatre. Music evokes feeling at this underlying level—a level that may be characterized as belonging to a world of 'pure' feelings not yet translated into emotions or *bhāva*-s of normal experience. We can call this level the *tanmātra* of feeling, where feeling has not yet assumed a definable, contextualized outward form. It is an abstract level of feeling which music can explore with greater power and freedom than any other art, giving it meaningful form as well.

I have spoken here of *svara* but not *tāla*, which in music articulates rhythm or *chanda*. The reason is that it is *svara* that distinguishes music; *chanda* is common to all the arts. But it may be said that in music *chanda* acquires variety, wealth and even an independence of articulation that is unique. Also, if we speak of feelings in the abstract, detached from life-situations, *chanda*, like *svara*, is naturally capable of exploring them. We can speak of rhythm as articulating the flow of feelings. And *tāla*, as we know, is capable of being an independent art on its own and exploring the flow of feelings with great sophistication and innovativeness. Yet rhythm on its own, even as *tāla*, remains a somewhat incomplete and 'empty' art. Different arts give it content in their own ways. Music does it through *svara*.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Udyotakāra in his *Vārtika* on the *Nyāyasūtra*-s, 1, 1, 4, speaks of 'those' who classified the eye and the ear as *aprāpyakāri*: *aprāpyakāriṇi cakṣuḥśrotre ityēke*. These 'those', or 'ityēke' seem to be early Buddhist thinkers: the *Atthasālinī*, for example, speaks of *ghrāṇa*, *jihvā* and *kāyā (tvak)* as *prāpyakāri* or '*sampattaviṣayagāhaka*' (see *Bauddha Pramāṇa Darśana*, introduced below). However, even in the later discussion, where the very idea of the division was challenged, it was the eye and the ear that remained classed as *aprāpyakāri*. The controversy as to how the senses 'grasped' their objects, was old. Gautama himself seems aware of it. According to Nyāya, *pratyakṣa* or sense-apprehension requires a *sannikarṣa* (which may be understood as some kind of 'coming in touch', 'closeness' or 'contact' or the like) between the sense and its object. But the nature of the *sannikarṣa* poses a question, especially since different senses obviously relate to their objects differently. The eye, for example, can have a '*sannikarṣa*' even though obstructed by a sheet of glass or mica, a condition in which the other senses will have no *sannikarṣa*. Evidently, such considerations were of general concern among thinkers, whatever their school of thought, and led to the classification of different senses as *prāpyakāri* or *aprāpyakāri*. The *Nyāyasūtrakāra* Gautama himself in *sūtra*-s, 3,1,45..., takes up the matter, implying that it was an ongoing discussion. In 3,1,45 he uses the phrase '*aprāpya grahaṇam*' in saying that the eye can perceive its object without an actual contact (*aprāpya*), since it can see things through the obstruction of

glass or a sheet of mica or *sphaṭika* (*aprāpya grahaṇam kācābhraṇaṭālasphaṭikāntarītopalabdheḥ*). The discussion concerning the matter was widespread and continued for some centuries. For a history and a detailed, lucid exposition of the discussion, see Ambikadatta Sharma, 'Prāpyakāritvāprāpyakāritvavāda,' Chapter 7, in the recently published *Bauddha Pramāṇa Darśana* (Sagar: Vishvavidyalaya Prakashana, 2007).