

Essays on Music and Cosmic Evolution

by

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“Chapter XI—Music and Cosmic Evolution.”

Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Essays on Music and Cosmic Evolution

According to the science of Physics, sound requires for its manifestation a vibrating or sonorous body; a directing, controlling or causative force; and a medium through which the vibrations induced by that force acting upon that body operate. The latter may be a vast or universal accommodation, as the seas of water or the ocean of air, or it may be a very particular and limited form, some manufactured instrument or a living organism.

The teaching of ancient India did not differ radically from modern science in this respect, only it seems to have looked much farther in certain directions. Whereas in science we speak of force and matter or mass, and in philosophy of spirit or mind and matter, the Sanskrit terms, purusha and prakriti, are, if anything, more comprehensive, imparting a livingness to these terms. That is to say, prakriti is something more than a blank or blind Nature, being the potentiality of form, endowing it with a sort of life and does not refer to inert mass, while purusha is not limited in its inclusion of force to even the physical and mental, for insofar as intelligence and love are forces, they are aspects of purusha. In other words, these are both vital terms, prakriti including the nexus for forms of all sorts, and within purusha one must see every type of form or potentiality.

It is quite possible that if we delved deeply into such metaphysics, we should also arrive at the doctrine of Monism, that is to say, universal or cosmic unity. Monism has the virtue of reconciling religion, philosophy, and science through a grand synthesis; it is not dependent upon individual reflection or speculation as is so much of Western philosophy. Both in its absolute and relative phases it has served as a vehicle for the expression of wisdom as well as knowledge, and the researches of some of India's modern savants may stimulate us to continue investigations along that line, bringing the whole of humanity intellectually to a broader point of view.

This philosophy of India offers scope for an apparent and relative duality in which we speak of opposites and differences, at the same time holding to an underlying reality which includes such pairs or groups of terms. So there is no segregated purusha without a particle of prakriti, nor is there any absolute prakriti, which would be as dead form, or rather, chaos. It is from purusha that we derive all that is acting or imposing or positive, including even the forces of the physical world, while it is from prakriti that all forms, whether material or mental are moulded.

If prakriti existed independently of purusha there would be such a thing as solid matter. Now we know this is impossible, that while we may approach to some extent the production of an absolute vacuum, not everybody realizes that there cannot be absolute solid matter. And this point becomes particularly significant in examining the scientific possibilities latent in Indian metaphysics and especially Monism.

As bodies are not perfectly rigid or solid, they therefore vibrate when struck and may be called sonorous, although there is a decided difference in the qualities of the sounds and noises resulting from masses being bombarded or touched. The character of sound varies according to the elasticity, solidity and other qualities of resounding objects, and again we may hear very delicate tones as from the musical stones which were used by the Chinese at an early date.

The mineral kingdom furnishes some of the materials used in string and percussion instruments, and man has drawn upon both the plant and animal world for his tools. If we accept the theories of the Hindus, we should say that instrumental music, which they call Vadan, is based upon prakriti more than upon purusha. That is to say, the material, contractive, hardening aspect of the universe furnishes the foundation for the art. Contrariwise, when we study these sounds made by animals or man, whether vocal or avocal, there is something of the will or intelligence or both which is causative; that is to say, such music is more dependent upon purusha, the rarefying, uplifting, intelligent aspect of substance, or spirit, which is predominant.

Let us accept for the moment the traditional doctrines of the East, as to the divisions of evolutionary spheres, and examine the type of music or sound which is produced by the living entities of various grades. Beginning from the lowest, we have demon, animal, or raksha, asura, man, gandharva, and deva. Yet it is also true that all these groupings have their representatives within mankind; it is man who can synthesize them all, as he is a veritable microcosm.

The demon has no music, for whatever life there be in such a creature, it is life without harmony. The diabolic man cannot sing; at best he gives forth a raucous laugh or a noise horrible in its nature. His character is inharmonious, he is ever trying to divide and destroy and his personality is evident in his speech and actions. And that same lack of harmony touches his inner nature, making its appearance in the atoms and cells of his physical body, so that the disintegrative movement touches him in all spheres and he is neither happy nor beautiful nor self-sustaining; he depends upon his own wickedness rather than on his vital forces for his sustenance.

Clairvoyants and other persons have claimed to hear diabolic sounds in haunted houses and around certain ruined places. Sometimes even those of no greater than average sensitivity have made such reports. The quality of such sounds and noises is very much the same as those of very wicked persons. By diabolical type one does not mean a criminal so much as one who is so utterly unconscionable that he will use other persons to attain his ends; also some maniacs may be classified here.

Not much effort has as yet been made to employ music in the regeneration of criminal types. While it has been said that "Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast," very often the significance of this is so varied, that no hard and fast conclusion can be drawn. There is a vast difference between a simple raga or melody of a reed-pipe and a Brahms symphony, between the simple song of a nomad and a Bach Choral or selection from the latest musical comedy.

The Advaita philosophy of Vedanta presupposes an underlying cosmic harmony, and it is through

this harmony that we can reach the inner consciousness of most persons. The diabolic person is as though spiritually dead; either he evades the effects of harmony or he is actually insensitive to them. So the only way to help him is through conquest, through mastering him, through dominating his wicked will.

The principle of Tamas, Chaos, represents the theoretical absence of harmony. A creature totally devoid of it is miserable no matter where he dwells, and he becomes the nexus for all that is miserable and horrible. In the presence of music he is either silent or behaves as if nothing were being played. He is often tone deaf and does not react to anything that is beautiful in form or sound. In extreme cases even the cells of his body reveal this condition, and a pathological or post-mortem examination of his body shows the absence of cohesion, unity, and health.

It has been said that some adepts in the Far East have been trained in the mystical or occult schools in certain practices whereby they are enabled to dominate the will of wicked personalities, and at least prevent them from doing more mischief. Very little love is in such natures, but there is a tradition that when Buddha attained his Parinirvana the light from his being was so great that it touched the souls of all creatures, even of those on the lowest planes and brought them much illumination and relief. This is a rarity and the average person, without much development, cannot help the diabolic type by any of the means at his command unless he also imbibes some spiritual knowledge to touch the inner cord of the one to be helped.

Among animals beasts produce sounds which may not always seem very musical, and yet they have qualities which would sharply distinguish them from rude noises. What we call rhythm, the production of a given number of beats in a given time, especially a given number of a definite type of beats, arises out of prakriti, the womb of nature. This principle appears not only in the music of animals and rakshas, but in their movements. This is true, whether we study crawling, flying, swimming or walking creatures.

It is possible that rhythms of a very fundamental nature are found both in the infra- and super-physical worlds; that is to say in the vibrations within the atom, whatever be their nature, as well as in the grand movements of stars and galaxies, and in the phenomena of light and electro-magnetism common to both. This goes to prove the close relationship between the musical principle of rhythm and the form-aspect of the universe, that is to say prakriti.

In the lower stages of biological evolution, where there is comparatively little intelligence, it is certain that this prakriti predominates as against purusha, the intelligent aspect. But as we ascend in the scale, where there is greater development of mind and the presence of a certain amount of self-will, we find that melody appears in the personality of the animal, as well as in its music. This is particularly true of the birds who fly in the air and who are not so earth-bound.

Even the graceful movement of the swan can be called a dance and the ideas suggested by Havelock Ellis in *The Dance of Life* can certainly be applied to nature, as Fabre and others have investigated, and on the other hand, the psychology of the song can be added to that of the dance.

In other words, to complete a study of the music of life, the advantage of Monism is suggested which considers the cosmos as one and all forms as various gradations on a gigantic scale of evolution. And in this the relation of melody or tune to purusha is emphasized, so that the intelligence of forms and creatures becomes manifest either in song or trance according to the type of their art, and the quality thereof.

Melody being linked with intelligence, it would appear that animals lower in the scale would not have the ability to make sounds of many gradations of pitch. It is certain that the musical range of many beasts is quite small. They make rather noisy sounds as the braying of the ass or the roaring of the lion. Yet compared with the demoniacal laugh or howl, these sounds include something of a finer nature. When the love element is present, as in the mooing of the cow calling a calf or in the bleating of sheep, the sound approaches a true musical tone more than in the other instances.

As a rule, the sounds of the animals show the predominance of purusha, for it is the inner personality which is striving to express itself and so there is some essence of melody. There are some animals, however, which can give out another music, more dominated by prakriti, and therefore rhythmical rather than melodic, such as the purring of the cat. The joy of the feline is thus sometimes expressed inwardly by this rhythmical music, or else outwardly in the melodious though awkward dance sometimes performed by cats. This last shows a kind of intense joy, which can be regarded as spiritual for an entity in that state of evolution.

What is true of the animal, or beast particularly, seems to hold for that unseen world of the raksha which is mentioned so often in Hindu literature. On the psychic side it would appear that the animal and raksha are rather close, if not identical, and it is certain that the music, if such there can truly be, of such entities, is very similar in its fundamentals to that of the beasts.

Next higher in the scale, according to Oriental tradition, comes the asura. This stage of evolution reveals a realm of comparative intelligence where darkness or shadow predominates over light. For, according to an almost universal tradition, the asura was a fallen angel, possessing an intelligence like the angel or deva, but having become selfish, doomed to live in a realm of comparative darkness.

The music of such beings is in the highest grade wherein prakriti dominates purusha. That is to say, it is here that we find the most complete and complex forms of rhythmical expression. Where rhythm is so evident, instinct and passion find their outlets, whereas when melody is evident, it reveals a more complete mental control.

Nevertheless there is something in this world of rhythm which finds its expression in all kingdoms. Whether we ascend or descend in the scales of cosmic music, there is something of its nature present. When we transcend rhythm, then we enter into the Universal Silence which is above and beyond all form (prakriti).

The popular music of the day which is stressing rhythm, is asuric and perhaps most popular music

has always been asuric. For the masses have not learned to dominate their passions and emotions. They react chiefly to those tonal combinations which interest them and stimulate them, even though it be the lower side of their nature which is so affected. It is not necessary to condemn dance or song therefore it undoubtedly has its place in the scheme of things, and in the absence of art we probably find much ruder customs related to marriage, morals, and the sex side of life.

In extreme instances we have the dances of the African natives and some Amerinds which are very interesting to the student of the laws of music and sound. We need not regard such rhythmical dances and music as low, for there is much knowledge still to be gained through the study of rhythms. It is claimed that even the elements can be mastered when one has a thorough knowledge of this subject, and there may be a very deep significance in many folk and agricultural festivals.

As the inarticulate mass of humanity seems to belong to the asuric stage of evolution, much can be learned by observing the changes which take place in either moral or mental development. The spiritualizing of asuric music produces something like a wail or moaning. This is particularly characteristic of the repentant soul but it is also true of the music of some races in the lower stages of culture. Often such peoples are not capable of producing lively melodies even when they seem to have a fairly complete knowledge of rhythms and their uses.

A like form of tones appears in the voices of some inmates of certain institutions, as among the feeble mind. While one need not go to the extreme of advocating ability to sing melodies as a basis for mental measurement, yet it seems that among the more intellectual peoples there is greater enjoyment in music which encompasses several octaves and even some singers among such peoples have a wide range of pitch in their field.

In man, mind and matter meet. His voice expresses his personality. Man, according to his stage of evolution can produce the sounds of demon, animal, or raksha, asura, man (manasic or mental stage) or even of the higher grades of beings. Man is what he is and he is all potentiality, according to spiritual Monism. As the voice of man has been studied somewhat more than that of other beings, it is not necessary to comment upon it at this point except to recall attention to the main principles of music.

Rhythm, born of prakriti, arises from the earth and can establish a place in life which promotes health and bodily strength. Melody, born of purusha, is a mental product and influences the mind. Composers of melodies and symphonic themes generally have good mental equipment, while popular song and dance writers who depend largely upon rhythm may be more emotional or instinctive. In some of the so-called modern neo-classical compositions which attempt to evade one or more of the great fundamentals: rhythm, melody and harmony, we can see signs of disintegration in the personality of the composer and often pathological conditions also; this would certainly be true if we accepted the Vedantic philosophy.

When character is purified through self-control we can look for finer melodies and better qualities in

the tones of singers. This is always true of the music of the gandharvas, beings who on their own plane occupy a stage of evolution concordant with that of human genius. The gandharva is the centaur of the Greeks, half man, half horse, symbolic of the control of passions by the enlightened mind. Such a one is capable of teaching and demonstrating all the arts, and it is from the corresponding type of genus homo that we may seek for our geniuses and leaders.

The music of the spheres is not dependent upon the rhythms of artificial instruments or upon the cadences of any emotion. Rather does it draw upon the very universe for its form and movement. Therefore while it depends upon a predominating melody, corresponding to some thought or idea, it supplies its own rhythm of creation, and melody of the mind, the higher or positive aspect, so harmony belongs to the Universe itself, which may be qualified as highest, but is really all inclusive. This is, in Sanskrit terms, Atman; Hebrews and Christians may refer to it as the Word, and Hindus say of it, “Nada Brahma,” “God is Sound.” This universal harmony arises from and transcends both prakriti and purusha, and it is directed to some particular end always.

Therefore the music of the gandharvas is always harmonious. The centaur was an harmonious creature. In the purified mind of man, not only does purusha dominate over prakriti, but there is a feeling of the absolute and the presence of inner joy or peace—in other words, of harmony. Meditation, concentration and self-surrender purify the mind, body and breath of a person, and make it possible for him to sing more beautifully; indeed they aid him to do all things wisely and well. The Mantra Yoga of the Hindus has tremendous possibilities, and all ancients used music to aid in spiritual development.

Finally in purifying and spiritualizing even this noble music, or perfecting the characters at that stage of evolution, we come to a Unity wherein the voice is no longer concentrated on any particular thought or form of variety, but on Isvara, the All-Pervading Personality, the Cosmic Purusha-Prakriti, or Atman or Brahm. The music at this stage has no scale or raga; it is the single note of the heart, be it heart of man or jinn, of gandharva or deva. This is the music of the angel or deva, singing in praise to the All-Perfect Being, and it is the apotheosis of all music.

¹ Pan, the inventor of the flute, and the fauns of the Romans correspond to the gandharva, while the satyrs of those people were the same as the asuras.

Note:

Corresponding to the five kingdoms of raksha, asura, man, gandharva and deva, the Sufis have their five grades of ego or nufs: ammara, lawama, mutmaina, salima, and alima. The Sufi's through their music have discovered a mystical and scientific method of raising the soul from one of these grades to another until perfection is attained.

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Chapter XI—Music and Cosmic Evolution

The student of Physics learns that sound requires for its manifestation a vibration or sonorous body; a directing, controlling or causative force and a medium through which that force operates. The latter may be a vast, universal accommodation, such as the seas of water or the ocean of air, or it may be a very particular and limited form, a tuning fork, or a reed derived directly from nature or the outcome of the efforts of man; besides which there is the voice and the sounds of insects.

The teaching of ancient India did not differ very radically from modern science in this respect; only it had a different outlook and perhaps penetrated deeper into causes, less into effects. Whereas the scientist speaks of force or matter or mass and the philosopher of spirit and matter, the ancient Samkhya-ist classified everything in terms of purusha and prakriti. To him purusha was not a dead cause, but a universal vibrational system which gave rise to living forms and personalities; prakriti was not dead either, but meant the same as nature, the atomic conformations which are ever about to be born, to be formed, but which are not eternally stable.

From this the Hindus have been led to accept what is commonly called “metaphysical monism.” That is to say, the universe in all its aspects is One, and thus every part is, in a sense, related to every other part. This Monism has had the virtue of reconciling religion, philosophy, psychology and science through a grand synthesis. It is not dependent upon the reflections of individuals as so much of Western philosophy is. Both in its absolute and relative phases it has served as a vehicle for the expression of wisdom as well as knowledge and the modern researches of East Indian savants lead to further possibilities in this all-embracing point of view.

Yet this philosophy of India also offers leeway for an apparent relative duality in which one speaks of differences and opposites, while holding onto a common underlying reality which includes both. So there is no segregated purusha without a modicum of prakriti, nor any absolute prakriti which would be dead, stable, form. And it is from purusha that we derive all aspects of intelligence, personality, thought, and even the forces of the physical world; while from prakriti come both mental and material forms, the former still uninvestigated scientifically, and offering tremendous scope and possibilities.

If we could have prakriti without purusha we should have solid matter. If natural forces prevent the manifestation of an absolute vacuum, they also demonstrate the impossibility of an absolutely solid body or mass. This fact has become accepted by the scientists but it has not been impressed psychologically upon the popular mind. Its significance becomes most important in presenting to the Western world any apology for Indian metaphysics, such as that of Yeats-Brown.

Bodies are to a degree sonorous, in that when struck, sound is emitted. The type and character of sound varies according to elasticity, solidity and other qualities of objects. Thus, on the one hand, we have dull noises or muffled sound and on the other, extreme musical tones which come when certain stones or meteorites are hit.

Sangita, the Indian science of art and music, was divided into three portions which dealt, respectively, with singing, playing and dancing. The instrumental music is necessarily that most associated with prakrit. It must derive materials from nature. Thus we select drums and cymbals and gongs from the mineral kingdom, although animals and plants also furnish portions of the former. And as we rise in the scale from mineral, through vegetable and animal, to man, we add something of purusha or spirit.

Now we can view the music of the universe in accordance with this basis and with the traditions held in ancient India which have been, in part, also preserved in Buddhist countries, notably Japan, although it often appears that the theories are not understood. Or mean very little. According to those ancient teachings, life took on various aspects, the lowest being the naraka, or cold hell; then the preta or hungry demon, animal or rakshasa, asura, manushic (human, from manas, the mind,) gandharva and deva.

The lowest stage is enshrouded in silence and the mineral kingdom too, of this world, of itself emits no sound. The demon knows no music, lacking harmony. The diabolic man does not sing; at best he produces a raucous laugh, often of a horrible nature. His character is inharmonious, he seeks to destroy, and his personality is reflected in his deeds and in his life. It touches his inner being, and that lack of harmony makes its appearance in the atoms and cells which constitute his physical and metaphysical vehicles. Therefore, a person of diabolic nature is never happy, is not beautiful and depends upon others for his vital nourishment. We can easily exemplify this today by numerous, almost self-evident examples.

It has been claimed that certain disembodied entities utter diabolic sounds; at least clairvoyants and others claim to hear them in houses called haunted. Often, persons of no greater than average sensitivity seem to hear them. The same quality may be perceived in very wicked persons, by which is meant, not so much the so-called criminal types as those diabolical persons who use others to attain their ends—and perhaps again in maniacs, in such a form as maniacal laughter, which is different again from the diabolical sound.

Little effort has been made to adopt music to benefit criminals, although there has been some discussion about it. Generally, there is little real knowledge about the true moral aspects of the subject. While it has been said that, “Music hath charms to soothe the savage breath,” the wherewithal is still outside our ken. Until there is far better understanding of the breath than the West has today (and no one has taken the slightest trouble to answer Yeats-Brown, Madame Neel or Brunton, and they could not if they would); and until all aspects of the detrimental effects of symphilis are understood, from the lowest to the highest — including a practical recognition of the existence of the Holy Spirit, instead of keeping it only as a part of more or less recognized “credos,” little progress is to be expected. In other words, the world will have to face, fairly and squarely, the existence of spiritual realities. This at least the Advaita philosophy of India does, and it can be accepted without the slightest detriment to any of our religious beliefs or prejudices.

According to Hindu philosophy also, there are the three fundamental qualities of Tamas, Rajas and

Sattva, which, while they can be translated by single words, contain so much more in them that they are often best left untranslated. Thus, the principle of Tamas (cp. Hebrew Tehom, Babylonian Tismat) represents the theoretical absence of harmony and signifies darkness and passion. A creature under its influence would lead a miserable existence, and would have no true musical expression. The hyena is an example of it in the world of beasts, and perhaps the kite, in the world of birds (even the eagle has some nobility). The tamasic person is often tone-deaf and the cells of his body indicate a pathological condition.

This person must be disciplined, not harmonized. He does not respond to music or prayer. The gentler aspects of love do not touch them; even Jesus Christ had to use the whip on occasions, which does not signify any absence of love or wisdom. Yes, there is a tradition that on attaining His parinirvana, the light of Buddha touched all creatures, from the lowest planes to the highest, and Jesus, also, on His resurrection. But practically, the tamasic person has to follow, his leadership only spreads confusion.

No doubt among animals there is a kind of music and especially with respect to what we call rhythm. Rhythm, the production of a given number of beats in a given time, arises out of prakriti, the womb of nature, and its influence is apparent in creatures near the earth. One aspect of this influence comes in the dance that certain animals undertake, but mostly we notice it in the sounds of insects and in the purr of the feline

The birds which fly in the air are not so earthbound, and in a great number of them we find melody without so much rhythm. Melody or tune, the other great fundamental of music, is derived not from prakriti, but from purusha, and manifests according to the intelligence. It also influences the graceful movements of flying creatures. The music of birds, however, is not all of one order; according to their nature they produce different sounds and we can recognize the music of all grades of evolution among them.

The musical range of the beast, so far as pitch is concerned, is comparatively small, and the sounds may be quite noisy; thus the braying of the ass or the roar of the lion. Yet compared to the demonic laugh or howl, these contain something of a finer nature, not nearly so repulsive. And as the love element increases, the sound of the beast also becomes more and more music, as in the cow mooing for her calf, and the sheep bleating.

These sounds arise from the purusha in the animal, which is expressed through the open mouth and offers the first possibilities of melody. Of course, many animals have much more rhythmic or prakritic music than melodic, or purushic. The most evident example is that of the cat which purrs so nicely, but whose “love calls” indicate a mixture of tamas, darkness (and the cat is not disturbed by the dark) and rajas (action and passion.) Thus, the joy of the feline is expressed inwardly by rhythmic music and outwardly in a quasi-melodious effort, which is often accompanied by a rather unrhythmical dance.

From the Hindu view, the “animal-soul” and the rakshasa-spirit are about identical. Although they

pictured other beings in the same world as the rakshasa, all of these had various animal-like qualities whatever the conceivable form they assumed. The sounds that the rakshasa uttered were like those of animals, and their musical sense was just as limited.

The asura represents a higher state of evolution than the rakshasa, and although these beings are regarded as being shrouded in darkness, yet they had reached a higher stage of development with respect to intelligence. According to some traditions, an asura was a fallen deva; one who had used his wisdom for selfish ends. So the asura expressed the highest grade of sound production, in which prakriti dominates purusha. Here one finds the very complete expression and development.

When rhythm dominates over melody, the lower passions dominate in the personality. Nevertheless, there is some expression of rhythm in every part of the universe where there is music. If nothing else, it is connected with the ebb and flow of the breath. Only when we enter into the Absolute Silence do we come to a place where rhythm seems absent. The popular music of the day, which stresses rhythm, is largely asuric; perhaps popular music of most ages and places has been of this order. It has been used to intoxicate and stimulate, not to elevate.

However, it is not necessary to condemn dances and songs which appeal to the lower side of man's nature. The dances of the African and American natives show a high degree of appreciation of rhythm; so much so that the "white" people have been making use of them, without, however, understanding their true purport or their deep significance, especially their connection with nature.

As the asura becomes spiritual, he becomes repentant; as he becomes repentant, he becomes spiritual. Thus, the wail or moaning would be characteristic of this music, and it is dominant in Dante's "Anti-Purgatory." It is also characteristic of the races of limited mental development who have not reached the manushic stage. Their songs are quite devoid of lively melodies, and seem to have a note of sadness. Among inmates of mental hospitals we find similar types.