

SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL AWAKENING THROUGH MUSIC IN INDIA

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Music is a dynamic medium for an artistic expression of one's experiences. Music expresses emotions, knowledge, social and spiritual values, human behavior etc. It is said that a society is reflected through its music. In order to appreciate a speech the listener needs to understand it intellectually but to appreciate music the listener needs to experience the emotions of the musician. However, the lyric of the music conveys the theme. Music provides a connection to feelings of the listener. Music with themes of spirituality and social awakening will provide for both heart and head of the listeners.

It is said that music has power of communication. In the words of poet H.W. Longfellow "Music is the universal language of humankind". This means that music easily reaches to diverse type of listeners. Music plays an important role in all societies. Music is also a driving force for dance. Music is formed through the sounds of nature. Musical compositions unite the experiences of composer and harmonious melody of the singer. Music can transform the listener. Music can take the listeners to different levels of moods and experiences. According to Hindu scriptures, the art and science of music has divine origin. In the words of yogi-seer Sriranga Sadguru, "Music should become the bridge that takes the listeners from sensual level to the spiritual level of Atman"

Every musical rendering has a theme that brings out the inner feelings and experiences of the composer. In India, the origin of classical music is traced into Sama Veda. Vedas are infinitely large collection of mantras heard by sages in their deep meditative states. These Veda mantras carry spiritual vibrations and convey knowledge about cosmos, universe and life. Then the classical music brings the emotions from the sublime experiences. The two forms of classical music are Hindustani and Carnatic. Then there are folk music, devotional music, festive music, etc.

This brief article deals with the musical compositions of saints of India. These compositions awaken the seekers to spirituality and also point out the social issues that confront the seekers. The saints such as Shankaraacharya, Ramanujaacharya and Madhvaacharya composed verses in simple Sanskrit to communicate spiritual and social values. In Bhaja Govindam, Shankaraacharya advises that "One should develop intelligence to relinquish greed and develop the ability to please one's mind with the earnings obtained through sincere and hard work". The shivasharanas such as Basavanna, Allamaprabhu and Akkamahadevi brought social awakening through simple verses as "Vachanas". Basavanna advises that purity has both internal and external aspects. Internal purity is in individual practice and external purity is with harmonious interaction with others. The saints of Maharashtra such as Jnanadev, Namadev, Tukaram and Janabai bring spiritual and social values through compositions as "Abhangs". Namadev addresses the Lord as "Oh! Lord, people say you are the master and I am an orphan. You uplift everyone and I am downtrodden. So if you do not respond to my cry, it will be shameful to you". The saints of north India such as Kabirdas, Ravidas, Tulasidas and Mirabai emphasize the consistent practice in remembering the glories of the Supreme Being. Kabirdas says "Remember the Supreme Being in any name. His abode is inside you

and seek there to find Him". Meerabai emphasizes that without spiritual love Lord will not bless and grace. In a composition Saint Chaitanya emphasizes humility and devotion for spiritual development. He says "one should sing the glories of the Supreme Being with humility as of a grass and forbearance as a tree"

Similarly, Alvars and Nayanamars have outpoured their spiritual experiences and social equanimity in their compositions in Tamil. In one verse Poodatta Alwar says "Pray the Lord with devotion as the lamp in which love is the receptacle, ghee as the spiritual urge and spiritual joy as the wick". One of nayanamars, Appar says " God is in everyone as fire is in the wood and ghee is in the milk. One can see God by churning the mind with intelligence as the rope and spiritual love as the churning stick". The Haridasas of Karnataka such as Purandara dasa, Kanaka dasa, emphasize not only the human values but also spiritual realization as the ultimate purpose of human life. A 'dasa ' is one who has experienced God through which the mind has been humbled. In simple language these dasas have expressed their inner experiences that enable anyone to understand and follow. In one composition Purandara dasa says the human life is very great opportunity for spiritual realization and one should not lose or damage it. In another composition he says one should keep an account of mind's activities in terms of good and bad and move towards good and towards God. Purandara dasa has laid the foundations of carnatic music and is know great grandfather of carnatic music. Kanaka dasa also advises humility in life. It is not good to have pride on any account such wealth, birth, power etc. Some of dasas' compositions raise scientific questions. In one composition Kanakadasa enquires "Is the temple in space or is space in the temple or both temple and space are in the eyes? Are the eyes and intelligence are in you oh! Lord" Saint Tyagaraja's compositions bring spiritual experiences to the listener. In one composition he says that devotion in music is essential. The music with mere scholarship without devotion will not lead towards the spiritual realization of the Lord. In another composition he offers prostrations to all spiritually great people. Such music not only expresses the height of spiritual experiences of the composer but alsoshows the path for all the seekers at all times.

Concluding Remarks

This brief article has attempted to show the important role of music in conveying spiritual themes and social awakening through art of music that reaches the listeners. In India, music in all forms such as classical, devotional, religious, folk, etc has constantly brought the eternal theme of the Sanatana Dharma namely the ultimate purpose of human life is to realize and see God in everybody, everything, everywhere at all times.

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