

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE INDIAN AND WESTERN AESTHETICS IN THE LIGHT OF TAGORE'S AESTHETICAL VISION ON MUSIC

Indrani Roy

(Research Scholar)

Dept. of Rabindra Sangeet, Dance & Drama

Visva Bharati University,

Santiniketan, West Bengal, India

E-mail- [indraniroybdwn@gmail.com](mailto:indraniroybdwn@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*This article is based on the aesthetic emotion and expression of Rabindranath Tagore on the sublime beauty of Indian Music. Tagore has explored the eternal 'rasa' of Indian Music on the context of its purity which is the ultimate beauty of music as well as an Art. Endeavour of beauty in music depends on its expressiveness which leads us to the world of the Absolute where only the eternal Truth can sustain. Tagore's aesthetic attitude made him to drink the nectar of the Indian Music. Tagorian concept on beauty creates a bridge between the Indian concept of aesthetic and the Western concept of aesthetic. Therefore the 'Beautiful' in Indian music as Tagorian aesthetics, is not just a melody with major and minor notes but is the best medium of expressiveness of an artistic soul.*

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, Beauty, Infinite, Joy, Music, Tagore.

*"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all*

*Ye know on earth and all ye need to know"* (Keats J., 1820)

Music is the purest form of art as it reveals beauty in its every petal. It is the eternal truth that beauty creates a bridge towards aesthetics. Etymologically the word 'aesthetics' originated from Greek word 'aesthetes'. An ability to create a work of beauty, and an ability to realize and appreciate anything which is beautiful, constitute roughly the business of aesthetics. According to Dr. E.F. Carritt: "*Reflection makes it difficult to believe that beauty, anymore than pleasantness, is really a quality which belongs to physical things even when these things are not being perceived by human beings, or, when they are, strike them as ugly or indifferent. It is truer to say that certain objects perceived by the senses, especially colours, shapes and sound, or the mental images of these, are capable of arousing in some persons, at some tones, or even in all at all times, an experience we call aesthetic*". (E.F.CARRITT)

The Beautiful reveals the sense of aesthetics by its beauty. But the definition of BEAUTY is not static. In Tagore's philosophy BEAUTY lies in self-control, self-realization and in the consciousness of harmony in our soul. In our Indian Music, the melodious harmony between every note provides the solitude and vastness of solemnity

with profound pathos. It is the ultimate truth of life; and the utmost beauty lies in its 'cosmic emotion'. According to Tagore, when the external excitement generates an artistic beauty in our heart then the inherent beauty becomes the subsistence of music. Listening the graceful and facile voice of Ratan Devi, wife of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, the great philosopher of Indian art, Tagore wrote – *“Listening to her I felt more clearly than ever that our music is the music of cosmic emotion. It deals not primarily with the drama of the vicissitudes of human life. .... It is never its function to provide fuel for the flame of our gaiety, but to temper it and add to it a quality of depth and detachment.”* (TAGORE, FOREWARD TO THIRTY SONGS FROM THE PUNJAB AND KASHMIR, FEBRUARY 1913)

The Upanishads have said that all things are created and sustained by an 'Infinite Joy'; which reflects the Supreme power of TRUTH or 'BRAHMA'. According to Indian musical concept, 'NADA', the origin of Indian music is related to 'BRAHMA'. The Indian concept of beauty is 'ANANDAM' or the 'Infinite Joy' which is accompanied by existence and pure consciousness. Tagore's philosophy says that emancipation of soul lies in this 'infinite joy' which is beyond of materialistic sense, where the beautification is in itself. Gratification of art generates the 'Infinite Joy' which is the main objective of the creation of an art. Tagore has explored the reason of all the beatitude and all the equilibrium of the existing world in the path of 'Infinite Joy' of creation. These aesthetic attitudes provide fuel to Tagore to create his unparalleled work of art, literature and music.

The aesthetic experience, expressed in some sensuous form of reality or imaginary can conquer an individual's mind but it can be incomplete till the sensuous imagery in the mind has been given a material form in the external world. The great German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel considered the work of art as a sensuous representation of the Absolute. He said *“..... But art is the Absolute in sensuous form alone. .... The universe is formed in the Absolute as the most perfect work of art: for Reason, which recognizes the Absolute in it, it possesses Absolute Truth; for the imagination, which represents the Absolute in it, it possesses Absolute Beauty.”* (HEGEL). The 'Infinite Joy' comes out by the artistic expression. The 'absolute beauty' unfolds its mystical force through constant endeavour of Art. The philosopher poet Tagore emphasized upon this expressiveness of beauty as well as art. Indian philosophers interpret about the manifestation of 'BEAUTY' by explaining 'Rasa Theory'. Tagore's vision towards 'rasa' is quite same with his companions in the field of Aesthetics. According to him, a true art should have an exception in itself and what is responsible for this is nothing but the variety of expression. So in Music, expressiveness is an important domain which creates beauty that produces 'rasa' in man and leads towards aesthetic.

According to Tagore, expressiveness in Music depends on its lyrics and musical notes. The beauty and richness of lyrics leads Music towards the highest level of 'Aesthetic Emotion'. Tagore was the worshipper of literature. *Kirtan*, a typical form of music which

is found in Bengal, overwhelmed him with its beauty of lyric as it is precious in the field of literature. In bewilderment Tagore creates his marvellous songs where the lyrics complement the tunes and the tunes complement the lyrics. There is no supremacy between lyrics and tunes. Both have same importance to create an ideal music. By this vice-versa process, the beautification of Tagore's songs accomplished its journey towards highest level of aesthetic sense.

On the other hand Tagore was fascinated with the beauty of 'pure music' which is beyond of lyrics. In the perspective of beauty in music, it is told that the beauty in music consists wholly sounds artistically combined. We can find that how much it is true in the field of Indian Classical Music. Especially in the instrumental tunes and in '*alapa*' of a raga by a vocalist, the sublime beauty of 'pure music' just emerges out fully. To prove this word- 'sounds artistically combined'; the structure of notes, the pattern of notes of a raga is important. Each and every raga has its own appeal. By this distinction each raga unfolds the beauty which should be the absolute. So it should not be an exaggeration that in the field of Indian Classical Music the concept of beauty is 'end in itself'.

Tagore has realised the eternal sensation of the '*ragas*'. According to Tagore, raga *Vairon* is not just a tune with major and minor chords but actually it evokes the awake of the first ray of the dawn; raga *Vairabi* evokes the melancholy of the companionless Absolute; raga *Multan* evokes the utmost tiredness of the respiration of the scorching dusk; raga *Purvi* evokes the draining of the saline water from the eyes of a companionless evening as like a widow; raga *Paraj* evokes the drowsiness of the last part of the night. Actually in the concept of Indian Music there are some important factors as *rasa*, emotions, imagery etc. Though Tagore emphasized on the idealism in his earlier concept of music but day by day he began realizing that the pure beauty of music is more valuable as it is the sensuous representation of the absolute.

Beauty appeals mainly to the sight but also to the hearing through compositions. In music, the elements such as cadence, rhythm, lyrics have their own beauty and importance. They can create a majestic world where the audience can feel the '*rasa*' and at the end, their hearts pour with the 'Infinite Joy'. The 'Infinite Joy' not only satisfies their hearing but also satisfied their mind. The connoisseurs can feel the aesthetic beauty of music by satisfying their self-indulgence and aesthetic attitude. Edward Hanslick, the music critic and a prolific of works on music said: "*the beautiful is not contingent upon nor in need of any subject introduced from without, but that it contains wholly of sounds artistically combined..... primordial element of music is euphony, and rhythm is its soul; Melody is pre-eminently the source of musical beauty. Harmony, with its countless modes of transforming, inverting and intensifying, offers the material for constantly new developments, while rhythm, the main artery of the musical organism, is the regulator of both, and enhances the charms of the timbre in its rich variety.*" (Hanslick, 1854)

Tagore's philosophy about beautiful has generally been established on six pillars viz. Truth, Beauty, Welfare, Expression, Literature and Joy. These factors also reflects their ray upon Tagore's philosophy about beautiful in Music. Tagore emphasized on self

realisation. He dissociated knowledge from intellect. When we find truth by using our intellect, it becomes the internal truth which is eternal. By this sight of eternal truth we can have the aesthetic attitude and can find beauty from existing world. According to Tagore exploration of beauty should help the welfare of the society as well as mankind. A creative heart wants to express its emotions every moment and it reflects the eternal truth. These expressions lead us to the 'Infinite Joy' and it is the fruitfulness of every art.

Tagorian concept of aesthetics in Indian music is a bridge between the Indian and Western aesthetical concept on music. Tagore had been inspired by the Indian as well as the Western aesthetical concept and what is emerges fully is his unparalleled and exceptional thoughts and concept towards the aesthetical value of Indian Music. Tagore has explored the eternal '*rasa*' of Indian Music on the context of its purity which is the ultimate beauty of music as well as an Art. Endeavour of beauty in music depends on its expressiveness which leads us to the world of the absolute where only truth can sustain. Tagore's aesthetic attitude made him to drink the nectar of the Indian Music. Tagorian concept on beauty amalgamates the essence of the Indian concept of '*Anandam*' and the Western concept of 'Joyfulness'.

Rabindranath Tagore says in one of his song in the Gitanjali:

*"Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling, and gladness without measure. The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad."*

*("Patay patay hashi, o bhai, jay na manik gona—  
Suronodir kul dubechhe shudha-nijhar-jhara")* (TAGORE, GITANJALI, 14 TH AUGUST 1910) (TAGORE, SONG OFFERINGS, NOVEMBER 1912)

What is the heaven's river full of the 'flood of joy'? It is *Anandam* or Bliss which is at the core of all being. Pure integral *Anandam* or Bliss is the bliss of spiritual realisation. The reflection of the pure light of *Anandam* into the multi-tinted splendours of Art is called aesthetic delight. This is quite essential teaching of Indian Aesthetics and it is the teaching of Tagore as well. Though the Indian is called a pessimist, he has always felt and said that bliss is the central core of consciousness and that consciousness is the central core of life. The true principle of art is the principle of unity. Tagore refers to what he calls "the taste values" of art and makes us feel that, further, the artist combines what is individual with what is universal. Thus emotion and suggestiveness are of the essence of art; and art should express personality and should be thoroughly individual and yet completely Universal. Another vital element in art is the element of realisation of truth through love and sympathy. Further, we have in it the creation of freedom and the freedom of creation. Tagore is very fond of this Upanishadic expressions—viz. *Shatyam Shivam Sundaram* (Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty).

According to Tagore's illuminating remarks on Indian music it is very clear that our music, as it were, moves above the incidents of daily life is so full of detachment and

tenderness—as if it were appointed to reveal the beauty of the innermost and unutterable mystery of the human heart and the world. Tagorian concepts of the comparative study on the Indian and Western music are based on his aesthetical thoughts. According to Tagore the germ of Indian music is its melody while essential embodiment of western music is its harmony. The notes of Indian melodies have some relationship among one another with by virtue of *shruti* and applications of *meend*, *gamak*; while the notes of Western music are clearly distinct from one another.

Tagore's aesthetics analogized the solo performance of Indian melody with the infinite oneness of still midnight and the multitudinous character of Western music with the bustle of active day time. The Western music gives emphasis to the social enjoyment of men. Their Band Music is just like a chandelier which expresses the festive moods and generates the music with its boldness; while Indian music is just like the soft lustre of the silvery ray of the moonlit night. *Sahana* is the *ragini* which is used for the occasion of wedding festivals is not at all gay or frolicsome, but utmost sad in its solemnity. Indian *raginis* of springtide and rains, of midnight and daybreak, have the profound pathos of the all-pervading intimacy, yet immense aloofness of Nature.

Behind the concepts there should be a contrasting colour of aesthetical concept of Indian and Western music and this duality is in the depth of existence. Contradictory elements of free impulse and directive will work upon it and evolves an orderly scheme of things. Tagore has found a 'parallel' in human psychology. He realised that our passions and desires are unruly, but our character subdues these elements into a harmonious whole. According to Tagore: "*Melody and harmony are like lines and colours in pictures. A simple linear picture may be completely beautiful; the introduction of colour may make it vague and insignificant. Yet colour may, by combinations with lines, create great pictures so long as it does not smother and destroy their value.*" (Tagore and Einstein, 1931)

Therefore this topic is quite justified as Tagore's aesthetical concept is the fruition of the reconciliation of the Indian and the Western aesthetical concepts. Tagore has been deeply inspired by the expressiveness and harmonious beauty of western music; its artistically combined words or lyrics which are truly emancipation of the frolic joyfulness of human nature; it's aesthetical values where the beauty appeals mainly to the sight but also to the hearing. He says further -Song is glorious in its own right; why should it accept the slavery of words? Song begins where words end. The 'unexplainable' is the domain of music. It can say what words cannot, so that the less the words of the song disturb the song, the better.

In a conversation with the great scientist Einstein, Tagore stated – "*It is difficult to analyze the effect of eastern and western music in our minds. I am deeply moved by the western music- I feel that it is great, that it is vast in the structure and grand in its composition. Our own music touches me more deeply by its fundamental lyrical appeal. European music is epic in character; it has a broad background and is Gothic in its structure.*" (Tagore and Einstein, 1931). On the other hand Tagore was deeply moved by the '*rasa theory*' of the Indian aesthetics; its sublime beauty of the delicate relation between '*shrutis*' of the Indian music which leads us to the world of Absolute or '*Brahma*'. This research should find the impact of both aesthetical concepts in Tagore's concept and creation and prove the justification of the bridging of both concepts to create not a forth but a star.

Tagore's creative works as well as music become the monumental work of the field of the Indian as well as universal art. In bewilderment Tagore has created marvellous tunes and its lyrics. But what is the influence behind his creative thinking? It is a pleasure to find out the source of the 'fuel' for the flame of his unparalleled work in the field of music. The philosopher poet Tagore has deeply inspired by the Indian philosophy of aesthetics. From childhood he associated with the Upanishadic concepts. From the very beginning these environment makes Tagore to have an aesthetics attitude towards the beauty of the Indian music. He is the worshipper of '*Satyam Shivam Sundaram*'.

He realised that the eternal beauty of our Indian music is beyond of the materialistic world; its emotion is cosmic. But Tagore is the worshipper of the lyrics too. In Indian classical music, the lyrics are not as important as its tunes or the '*ragas*' are. But in western concept, the lyrics are as important as its tunes are and we can see a resemblance of this thought in *Kirtan*, a typical form of music which is found in Bengal. Here the concept of 'sounds artistically combined' generated by Edward Hanslick has taken place. In Tagore's music we can see that the both aesthetical concepts as Indian and Western emerges fully with their characteristics mentioning no boundary line between them. On the very beginning, Tagore emphasised on the reality of expression of the lyrics of music. He stated that the one and only duty of music is to express the feelings of the lyrics. But day by day Tagore realised that the eternal beauty of the music in its internal '*rasa*' which evokes the aesthetic senses. It is the core of the Indian aesthetics.

Therefore it is quite transparent that Tagore's aesthetical concept on Indian Music is not separate from his philosophy of life. It is the fruitfulness of the bridging of Indian and Western aesthetical concept on music. He realised the eternal sensation of the '*ragas*'. Tagore completely amalgamates the '*rasa*' of music with the '*rasa*' of life where the eternal beauty truly exists. We can identify the same tune in Tagore's songs based on various ragas reflecting the common feelings of our day to day life with an uncommon approach of such aesthetics feelings of Tagore which makes individuals to feel like a whole.

*"Music exalts each joy, alleys each grief  
Expels diseases, softens every pain."* (Armstrong, 1744)

As told by a Scottish poet is very much similar with the thoughts of Tagore about the beauty of the nature of Indian Music. It is the justification and significance of these comparative study and proving its relevancy to think now a line of 'Global Aesthetics'- a new discipline developing through inter-mixture of component belonging to both Indian and Western aesthetics which opens up a new window in the field of research on Tagorian aesthetics towards Indian music for the coming era.

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