

The Aesthetic Aspect of Indian Classical Music

Dr. Gagandeep Hothi

Assistant Professor

Department of Music, D.S.B. Campus,
Kumaun University, Nainital, Uttarakhand

Email: gaganhothi@gmail.com

Abstract

Present paper explores the aesthetic aspect of Indian Classical Music, a rich and complex musical tradition with its roots in nature & ancient Hindu scriptures. It is based on the idea of raga, a melody structure that provides the foundation for the composition of a piece of music and allows for improvisation and creative expression subjective to a particular individual & his musical capabilities. The aesthetics of Indian Classical Music are centered around the idea of virtuosity, the embodiment of the raga, the relationship between performer and audience, and the improvisational nature of the music. The focus on melody, the use of microtones, and the emphasis on virtuosity all contribute to the unique and captivating quality of Indian Classical Music. This music is still performed in temples and other religious places, as well as in concerts and performances all over the globe. Indian Classical Music continues to be an important part of India's cultural and spiritual heritage. This paper attempts to explore the aesthetic element of Indian Classical Music and how they contribute to its unique and captivating quality.



Keywords: Aesthetics; Indian Classical Music; Raga; Harmony; Creation

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Introduction:

Indian Classical Music is a rich and complex form of music that has been shaped over thousands of years. It is rooted in ancient Hindu scriptures and is said to have been created by the gods and goddesses themselves. This music is deeply intertwined with India's cultural and spiritual heritage and is considered one of the country's highest forms of artistic expression. Aesthetics has a major role to play in every form of Indian Classical Music.

Aesthetics is a fundamental aspect of music that influences its creation, performance, perception, and evaluation (Stige, 1998). It is a complex and multifaceted field that encompasses

the principles of beauty, emotion (Balkwill and Thompson, 1999), and musical form. Aesthetics is essential to the musical experience, shaping the way in which music is composed, performed, and perceived by the audience. By understanding the role of aesthetics in music, we can gain a deeper appreciation of the musical works that we listen to and the musical experience itself.

In today's world, Indian Classical Music continues to be an important part of India's cultural and spiritual heritage. It is still performed in temples and other religious places, as well as in concerts and performances, and is enjoyed by audiences both in India and around the world. The aesthetics of Indian Classical Music are a testament to the beauty and complexity of this art form and its influence can be seen in a wide range of musical traditions and styles. The present paper entails the importance of aesthetics and understands the confluence of it with Indian Classical Music.

Role and Importance of Aesthetics in Music:

Aesthetics, the study of beauty and the principles behind it, plays a crucial role in music. It determines the way in which the music is composed, performed, and perceived by the listeners. Aesthetics is an essential aspect of music that influences the creation and interpretation of musical works, and it has a profound impact on the musical experience.

One of the most significant functions of aesthetics in music is to shape the composer's creative process. Aesthetics informs the composer's decisions about the structure, rhythm, melody, harmony, and timbre of a piece of music (Ranjani et. al. 2019). The composer must consider the aesthetics of the piece, whether it is intended to evoke emotions, express a particular idea or theme, or simply create a pleasurable listening experience. For example, classical composers often used formal structures and regular rhythms to create balance and symmetry in their compositions, while jazz composers may use unconventional harmonies and free-flowing rhythms to express individuality and improvisation.

Aesthetics also plays a significant role in the performance of music (Schueller, 1955). The performer must consider the aesthetics of the piece, such as its emotional content, to determine how to express it through their playing. For example, a performer playing a passionate love song will likely use different techniques and emotions than they would when playing a fast-paced, energetic rock song. Aesthetics informs the performer's interpretation of the music and contributes to the musical experience of the audience.

The perception of music by the audience is also heavily influenced by aesthetics. The listener's understanding of beauty and musical principles shapes the way they respond to the music. Aesthetics can evoke emotions (Gabrielsson and Juslin, 1996), memories, or a sense of awe in the listener, and it can also evoke criticism or a negative response. The audience's reaction to music is a crucial aspect of the musical experience and is heavily influenced by aesthetics. Aesthetics also informs the way in which music is valued and judged. The musical canon, the collection of works considered to be the best in music history, is largely based on aesthetic criteria. The canon is informed by the musical taste of the time and by the historical, cultural, and social

context in which it was created. For example, classical music, which was widely regarded as the pinnacle of musical excellence in the 18th and 19th centuries, is now seen as only one genre of music among many and is often valued differently by different cultures and generations.

Aesthetics also plays a significant role in the creation of new musical styles and genres. New forms of music often emerge when composers and musicians challenge existing aesthetic norms and create new musical principles. For example, the development of blues and rock and roll in the 20th century involved a rethinking of the traditional forms of Western classical music and the creation of new musical principles based on different aesthetics. The same is true for other musical styles such as hip-hop, reggae, and electronic music, which have also been shaped by different aesthetics.

The Convergence of Aesthetics and Indian Classical Music:

Indian Classical Music is based on the idea of raga, which is a melody structure that provides the foundation for the composition of a piece of music (Gautam, 1980). The raga is made up of a series of melodic patterns and intervals that are used to express specific emotions and moods. The raga also serves as a guideline for the improvisation that takes place within the music, which allows for a great deal of expression and creativity on the part of the performer.

One of the key features of Indian Classical Music is its emphasis on melody over rhythm. Unlike Western classical music, which places a greater emphasis on harmony and structure, Indian Classical Music is focused on the flow and expression of the melody. This focus on melody allows for a great deal of improvisation and creative expression, as the performer is free to explore the different facets of the raga and express their own personal style.

Another important aspect of Indian Classical Music is its use of microtones, which are subtle variations in pitch that are not found in Western music. These microtones give the music a unique and captivating quality and are one of the defining characteristics of this musical tradition. The aesthetics of Indian Classical Music are closely tied to the cultural and spiritual values of India. This music is considered sacred and is often performed in temples and other religious places as a form of devotion. It is also performed in the context of concerts and performances, where it is used to express emotions, tell stories, and evoke specific moods.

One of the key aesthetic values of Indian Classical Music is the emphasis on virtuosity. Performers are expected to have a high level of skill and mastery over their instruments and are often judged based on their technical ability. This focus on virtuosity is seen as a way of showing respect for the tradition of the music and for the divine inspiration that is believed to be at the heart of this art form (Loureiro et. Al., 2019).

Another important aesthetic value is the idea of “raagdari”, which refers to the ability of the performer to fully embody the raga in their playing (Pudaruth, 2016). This involves not just playing the correct notes and rhythm, but also conveying the emotional and spiritual essence of the raga through the way they play. This is seen as a key aspect of music and is considered essential to creating a truly authentic and captivating performance (Tang, 2021).

The relationship between the performer and the audience is also an important aspect of Indian Classical Music aesthetics. The performer is seen as a guide, leading the audience on a musical journey and evoking different emotions and moods through their playing. The audience, in turn, is expected to be an active participant in the music, engaging with the performer and allowing themselves to be fully immersed in the experience. It is certainly an irrefutable fact that it is actually the audience who has the ability to extract quality music from a good musician apart from the other way around.

The improvisational nature of Indian Classical Music is another key aspect of its aesthetics. Performers are expected to be able to improvise within the raga, exploring its different facets and expressing their own personal style. This improvisation is seen as a way of breathing life into the music and making it relevant and meaningful to each performance.

Conclusion:

Indian Classical Music is a rich and complex art form that has been shaped by thousands of years of cultural and spiritual traditions. The music is based on the idea of raga, which provides the foundation for the composition of a piece and allows for improvisation and creative expression. The aesthetics of Indian Classical Music are centred around the idea of virtuosity, the embodiment of the raga, the relationship between performer and audience, and the improvisational nature of the music.

The focus on melody, the use of microtones, and the emphasis on virtuosity all contribute to the unique and captivating quality of Indian Classical Music. The idea of “raagdari”, the ability of the performer to fully embody the raga, is considered essential to creating a truly authentic and powerful performance.

The relationship between performer and audience is also a crucial aspect of Indian Classical Music aesthetics. The performer is a guide whereas the audience, in turn, is an active participant who paves the improvisational journey of the musician into the ocean of music, allowing themselves to be fully immersed in the experience.

Indian Classical Music is a beautiful and powerful art form that is deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of India. Its focus on melody, improvisation, virtuosity and the relationship between performer and audience make it a unique and captivating form of musical expression. Whether you are a lifelong fan or are discovering this music for the first time, Indian Classical Music is sure to captivate you with its aesthetics, beauty, power, and timeless appeal.

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