

RAGA AND MAYA

by Gundecha Brothers

In the perspective of a connoisseur, a *Raga* evokes a certain landscape of feeling in a listener. The depth of this experience unfolds a range of impressions, which an artiste explains through the medium of the many *rasas*. An experience of such dimensions is possible only when the combination of notes keeps the *Shadaj (Sa)* at its centre, and brings into harmony with this *Sa* every one of the other notes. The more accurate the harmonizing, the deeper is the experience through it. In other words, the impact of the construction of notes rests on the power and clarity of their connection to the *shadaj*. It can be seen that the *shadaj* is treated as the principal element in these vast fields of emotion and spirit.

In like manner, life also displays a similar inclination in that people are bound by a single cord of spirit. We see these relationships as brother, sister, son and daughter, wife, father and mother. But if we introspect, it becomes evident that there is a single central force bringing to expression all this kinship. It is the wife or the mother who takes on this role and through them all the other connections gain meaning and depth. In other words, the play of circles in humanity unfolds around the centers we create.

If we move the center from one to another root or person, every cord is altered and all relationships will move position bringing between the persons in the circle a changed compatibility. This is why we call it *Moh Maya* ? The illusion of the world? We see the world as illusion because we impose this illusion to make meaning out of the world.

Raga is understood in a similar light. The seven notes awaken a distinct emotional response when one note takes the place of the *shadaj* and the rest occupy suitable positions of consonance.

This entire structure and spirit, however, changes in the space of a second when we bring a different sound to take the position of *Sa*. This change of orientation of the sounds intrinsically creates a *rasa* and *bhava* quite different from the one that preceded it. It is important to note that the musical content has remained the same through this transition.

We observe then that the illusion of *raga* and fellowship share the same principle of harmony in bonding. Two brothers could well float away into different spheres of existence if, at the center, the position of the mother is replaced. In essence, man is not important. It is the brotherhood of man that is important. And it presents itself to us as *maya*.

This *maya* in the material, human world, which we can also call *raga*, is present in the same form in the unity of notes. By this virtue of affiliation, combinations of notes are termed as *raga*. The seven notes do not, from their mere existence, bring into presence a perspective of feeling (or spirit) until at the absolute center is placed a single sound as the *Sa* and the other notes distribute through the ether to their relative alignments.

The pentatonic *raga Malkauns* changes at the same instance that its *Sa* is moved from one sound to another. This second *raga* becomes *Durga*, which creates a fundamentally different *bhava*. Such is the ancestry of enchantment in music. And this was what the masters called *Raga*.

The world of sound that in our minds creates the *bhava* of *raga Malkauns* is by itself only solitary. And this world of sound forges the sound of *raga Malkauns* exclusively from the premise that we keep at the center an unobscured *Sa*. This is the ideal that we call *Maya*. Our love for another is manifest only because we maintain as the unifying force the one whom we recognize as mother, and from this, the other becomes a brother. Our love acknowledges not so much the person as the association. This alone is *Maya* and *Raga*.

—Translated by Netra Shyam