

Indian Encounters of the Quiet Beatle and Trane with Sun*

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Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing
dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.

(Rabindranath Tagore "Gītāñjali" 5)

§ 0 Ālāp (Introduction)

Some explanations may be required about a Surrealistic title in the same manner as "a chanced encounter on a table of dissection of a sewing machine with an umbrella". 'Quiet Beatle' is a familiar nickname for George Harrison (25.02.1943-29.11.2001) of the Beatles. John Coltrane (23.09.1926-17.07.1967), a legendary tenor sax player, was called 'Trane' among his friends. 'Sun' is meant for Ravi Shankar (b. 07.04.1920), a sitar maestro, for 'ravi' in Sanskrit means "Sun". Thus the subtitle we may have should be something like "The Reasons Why George Harrison and John Coltrane Were Spellbound by Indian Music through Ravi Shankar".

I still remember how I was thrilled by the shaking and weeping sound of the instrument George Harrison was playing, when I listened for the first time to 'Norwegian Wood', included in the LP <Rubber Soul> (1965). I thought the instrument must be an electric guitar played with certain techniques or some electric echo device until I found its name on the record sleeve. Sitar, an ethnic instrument from somewhere, which was totally new to me. That sound "*Beyo~ong Beyo~ong*", however, enchanted me.

And that break-through LP <Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band> (1967) caused a big sensation with its psychedelic sleeve and its change of musical taste as soon as it was released two years later. And so musically surprising was the first number of the B side titled 'Within You Without You'. It was full of genuine Indian flavour with *garam masālā* (mixed spices) of peculiar Indian instruments, whilst we had already had one small Indian flavoured tune 'Love You To' contained in the LP <Revolver> (1966).

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By that time the young generation all over the world came to know from hearsay that George had immersed himself in an Indian instrument the sitar, Indian philosophy and yoga, and that he brought the Beatles to India. But that a certain sexual scandal on the side of Indian yoga guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi forced the Beatles except George to 'Quit India' soon and so on. So what actually happened with 'Quiet Beatle'?

When I entered Tokyo University in 1968, our senior students took us fresh men to a jazz coffee house, "Swing" at Dogen-zaka Area in Shibuya as a part of an orientation programme. Thus I was baptised into what is called "Dan-mo" (a slang for 'Modern Jazz') and I soon came across the legendary LP <A Love Supreme> (1964) by John Coltrane in a literally swinging café. So impressive was the simple theme repeated ostinato-fashion and so powerful was the improvisation with a chaotic and roaring flow of melody by Trane's Quartette.

His style, commencing with the LP <Giant Step> (1959) was labeled as 'Modal Jazz,' which was said to be influenced by Indian music according to jazz critics. For example, one critic comments :

From the view point of musical forms, we can point out the influence of Indian music here (in 'A Love Supreme'). Or we can say he developed modal jazz based on a scale, instead of on chord structure.*¹

Another critic expounds :

.....it was quite obvious that he had Indian thought as his spiritual core inspired by Indian religious philosophy. And we can perceive his great interest in Indian music through Indian spirituality by listening to his performance itself. For example, the suite contained in the LP <Transition> recorded in spring 1965, adopted Indian music forms such as the *rāga*. This is true of his works from previous recordings such as the LP <India> up to his posthumous LP <Expression>.*²

For myself I could not understand, however, what was really meant by "influence by Indian music" or the *rāga* because of no further explanation by those critics who themselves seemingly didn't understand what Indian music actually was. Such knowledge thus remained only terminological knowledge to me then. It was not until I came to understand the theory of Indian classical music properly that I fully realised how deeply his music was coloured by Indian Raga theory.*³

To make matters more interesting, both the musicians came from quite different music fields and independently found Ravi Shankar as their initiator to Indian classical music. It seems to me now that both George and Coltrane were groping in the dark when they did encounter Ravi because they were destined to encounter him. 'Ravi' was the most ideal person who could show the way to Indian music as 'Sun' shines 'A Passage to India'.

This small paper will trace the interaction of George and Coltrane with Ravi from the following three aspects, consulting his two autobiographies “*My Music My Life*” and “*Raga Mala*”.^{*4}

- (A) Fascinated by Indian Music, Why ?
- (B) Initiated into Indian Music, How ?
- (C) Influenced by Indian Music, What ?

§ 1 Gat A (Theme A) / Fascinated by Indian Music, Why ?

First we have to glance at the social circumstances of the age where the Beatles and Coltrane were creating their own style, in the 1960s. Sufficient to say here that a brief American Chronology reflects what was going on in the world.

- 1961 J. F. Kennedy, the 35th President of USA
- 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis
(President J. F. Kennedy v. President Nikita Krushchev)
- 1963 Assassination of Kennedy
- 1964 Nobel Prize for Pastor Martin Luther King (1929–68)
- 1965 American Interference in Vietnam War (–75)
- 1968 Assassination of Pastor King
- 1969 Moon-landing of Apollo 11

In a short, it was the decade of Cold War between the USA and the USSR, Hot War in Vietnam, violence v. human conscience and the victory of technology. We know very well that the ‘Hippie’ movement and what is called ‘Student Power’ against the Establishment overlapped the latter half of this decade. Some hippies escaped from reality with the help of drugs and others quested for Oriental wisdom for peace.

In this context it is quite natural that Indian philosophy attracted a great deal of attention. Ancient Indian philosophers intuitively realised and experientially confirmed by means of yoga meditation that human beings as a Microcosm is identified with the universe as a Macrocosm. There is no difference between ‘You’ and ‘Me’ whose essence is the eternal spirituality. This idea that ‘*Brahman*’ as Ultimate Cause of the universe is identical with ‘*Ātman*’ as Spirituality of the individual is traditionally expressed in two great sentences (*mahāvākya*): “*tat tvam asi*” (lit. “You Are It.”) and “*aham brahmāsmi*” (lit. “I Am Brahman.”), which will be discussed in detail later.

As the Beatles were the voice of the young generation and the Beatles’ message appealed best to young people, all its members were sensitive to the quest of age. Amidst this atmosphere George was somehow drawn to Indian thought and music by a sort of destiny according to his own words, “there’s a good chance I had a connection with India

somewhere in the past, in a past life. In 1965 something happened that opened the door, or lifted the veil, and allowed me to realise: 'Yogis of the Himalayas -- and what's this music?'"*5

And in the following year 1966, he met Ravi in London.

The situation might be a little bit different in the case of Trane. First of all, as a suppressed black in American society he was a hearty supporter of the Civil Rights Movement lead by Pastor King who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace before his tragic assassination. So he must have felt an obligation to do something for the Movement. For him the arms were his music. "What can music and musicians contribute to the improvement of society without resorting to violence?" This must be his repeated question to himself.

On the other hand, as a jazz musician he shared common concerns for further steps in jazz development with other radical jazzmen. What is it jazz can do beside being for entertainment?

In the 1930s and 40s Jazz started its development as music for dances, and having experienced what is called 'Bop' Revolution, 'Modern Jazz' was born in the 50s. In the late 50s and early 60s Modern Jazz was eagerly seeking for, so as to say, the metaphysics for jazz as art music.

With this background Trane participated in the Miles Davis Quintette in 1955, making his solo debut. Then in 1960 he organised his own regular group and could gather together the strongest personnel, that is, MacCoy Tyner (p), Jimmy Garrison (b) and Elvin Jones (dms). By this period he seemed to have paid keen attention to Indian thought at least.

Trane finally met Ravi during the winter of 1964-65 in New York.

§ 2 Gat B (Theme B) / Initiated into Indian Music, How ?

Here we have to refer to the 'Sun' for them, namely, Ravi Shankar Chowdhury. It is Ravi who had the fatal responsibility to involve both George and Coltrane in Indian philosophy and Indian classical music in a real sense.

Ravi made his first concert tour to London, Germany and America from October 1956 to January 1957. And the genuine Indian classical music he brought to America for the first time was enthusiastically accepted by jazzmen who supposedly felt an affinity to thrilling improvisation and musical battle between melody and rhythm in Indian music.

Ravi says :

Although there were only a few concerts on my first solo foreign tour, they created such a level of interest that my future was already well established in Europe and America. I met many musicians, especially in the jazz field. Back then jazz musicians and jazz-music buffs were the major part of my audience.*6

In fact, there is a big difference between improvisation in jazz and Indian classical music. In a jam session musicians are free to do anything, in a sense, following a theme and certain chord progress. One can change the key at one's disposal and participate in or handing over improvisation at any time. On the other hand, these practices are strictly prohibited in Indian music. Indian improvisation should be in keeping with very rigid rules for both melody and rhythm. Ravi felt perplexed :

Owing to the improvisational factor common to both Indian music and jazz, many people take it granted that our music is like jazz—which is far from the truth. The improvisation in jazz is based on Western chords, harmony and a particular theme. In Indian classical music one improvises on a theme, either in the form of a song or in a *gat**⁷ based on a chosen raga (one of thousands !), being bound by rules and observing the complex rhythmic structures and time cycles, in each of which there can be anything between three and 108 beats.*⁸

Ravi is explaining the difference here by mentioning two key concepts for Indian music, i.e. '*rāga*' (a kind of mode patterns) and '*tāla*' (the complex rhythmic structures and time cycles). The concept *rāga* will be discussed in detail later.

As performing one tune often extends to as long as one and half hours, unbelievably long, jazzmen supposedly wanted to know how it was possible in Indian improvisation not based on the flow of chords. This being the case, the musical association of Ravi with jazzmen developed more and more as his popularity was growing. Ravi recollects his jazz fusion :

When I arrived on the West Coast in November 1961, Dick Bock had assembled several jazz musicians for an East-West recording : Dennis Budimir on guitar, Gary Peacock on bass, Louis Hayes on drums, and the famous jazz flautist Bud Shank. Although Kanai Dutt (tabla), Harihar Rao (dholak and kartal—an electrified type of wooden percussion that sounds like Spanish castanets) and Nodu (tanpura and manjira) performed. I didn't play on the piece myself. I wrote the main melody theme, based on the scale of Raga Dhani (which resembles the blues scale), and conducted as each musician improvised. It was my first experience of collaborating with non-Indian musicians in the jazz style.*⁹

Coltrane, at last came to Ravi's attention :

Dick Bock had often spoken to me about John Coltrane over the previous few years : about how he was fascinated by India, had become a fan of mine, and had all my records. At some point during the winter of 1964-65, when I was back in America giving something like forty-two recitals on another coast-to-coast tour (once again with the support of the Asia Society), Dick brought him to meet me in New York.*¹⁰

The modest personality of Trane left a strong impression on Ravi :

Coltrane's approach was different from that of most jazz musicians I had seen or met over the years. To hear good jazz, I mostly had to go to jazz joints in the big cities like New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. At these venues, even as all these brilliant musicians were playing, people would be drinking, smoking, eating and talking. Once in a while when a musician played an exciting solo the audience turned their attention to him and showed their appreciation by clapping with real gusto. But the venue used to be so thick with smoke (almost like the London fog of the old days) that my eyes burned and watered and I couldn't breathe. In spite of some of the most dazzling music that one could hear, the atmosphere was disturbing.

When John Coltrane came to me, he looked different from his contemporaries : so clean, well-mannered and humble. About six months earlier he had apparently given up drugs and drink, become a vegetarian and taken to read Ramakrishna's books. For a jazz musician to go the other extreme, especially in those days, was a pleasant surprise.*¹¹

Now we know Trane had already become a sort of Hindu *sādhu* (mendicant) even before he met Ravi. He adopted vegetarianism instead of drugs and devoured books on Hindu philosophy by mystic Ramakrishna (1836-1886) whose basic philosophy was constructed on Advaita-Vedanta philosophy. This orthodox monism representative of Indian way of thinking was expounded by one of the greatest philosophers in India, Śaṅkara (c.700-750).

He was intrigued by Indian music and asked me all about it. As a jazz artist, he was amazed by our different system of improvisation within the framework and discipline of fixed melody forms, by the complexity of our talas, and more than anything by how we can create such peace, tranquillity and spirituality in our music.*¹²

Here we should pay attention to Trane's delicate sensitivity to the qualities music can create. The qualities of peace, tranquillity and spirituality created by Indian music must have been a divine revelation of what he felt lacking in current jazz and what he was unconsciously searching for.

We met a few times and I taught him the basics about ragas and talas. He never sat with an instrument, but I would demonstrate with my voice and sitar while he wrote down a few notes and asked me questions. We had three or four sessions, at the end of which he said he was waiting for a chance to come and spend six months with me studying. We met again the next time I came to New York, for a short tour in 1966, when we fixed a date the following year for him to come to LA for a few weeks to learn properly from me. Sadly he died before then.*¹³

The several lessons Trane had from Ravi in the year of 1964-1966 immediately before his sudden death in 1967, were too limited to master even only its theoretical framework. But we can say he absorbed its essence to the extent that he was able to realise his masterpiece 'A Love Supreme'. I would like to add that Trane was such an admirer of Ravi that he named his son 'Ravi' after his mentor.

How was George initiated into Indian music, then? Ravi describes his first meeting with George as follows :

I met George Harrison for the first time in June 1966, one evening in a friend's house in London. At that time, although I had heard of The Beatles, I knew only that they were an extremely popular group. Something clicked from the very beginning with George. The other three I met on different occasions through the years, and Ringo especially was always warm and friendly, but I never really had anything much to do with any of them.*¹⁴

George encountered an ideal person to get exact information and guidance concerning his ardent desire to know 'yogis of the Himalayas and Indian music' since 1965.

From the moment we met George was asking questions, and I felt he was genuinely interested in Indian music and religion. He appeared to be a sweet, straight-forward young man. I said I had been told he had used the sitar, although I had not heard the song 'Norwegian Wood'. He seemed quite embarrassed, and it transpired that he had only had a few sittings with an Indian chap who was in London...to see how the instrument should be held and to learn the basics of playing. 'Norwegian Wood' was supposedly causing so much brouhaha, but when I eventually heard the song I thought it was a strange sound that had been produced on the sitar! as a result, though, young fans of the Beatles everywhere had become fascinated by the instrument.*¹⁵

To my surprise 'Norwegian Wood' was a result of Teach-Yourself practice of the sitar after learning the beginnings of beginnings from an Indian boy!

Then George expressed his desire to learn the sitar from me. I told him that to play sitar is like learning Western classical music on the violin or the cello. It is not merely a matter of learning how to hold the instrument and play a few strokes and chords, after which (with sufficient talent) you can prosper on your own, as is common with the guitar in Western pop music. I told him this nicely, getting him to understand the seriousness of Indian music.

I said, 'I have given so many years of my life to sitar, and by God's grace I have become very well known-but still I know in my heart of hearts that I have a long way to go. There is no end to it. It is not only the technical mastery of the sitar-you

have to learn the whole complex system of music properly and get deeply into it. Moreover it's not just fixed pieces that you play—there is improvisation. And those improvisations are not just letting yourself go, as in jazz—you have to adhere to the discipline of the ragas and the talas without any notation in front of you. Being an oral tradition, it takes many more years.*¹⁶

After Ravi confirmed George's resolution, he accepted him as his disciple :

Then I asked him if he could give time and total energy to work hard on it. He said he would do his best, and we arranged a date then and there. It was not practical for him to come to my hotel, so he invited me to visit his house in Esher soon afterward. I went twice within a week or so. Initially I gave him some basic instruction—how to hold the sitar properly, the correct fingering for both the hands, and some exercises. I also wrote down the names of all the notes in the sargam (Indian solfeggio) to make him familiar with them. That was all. We fixed it that he would come to India for a couple of months to learn in more depth.*¹⁷

Along with sitar lessons, Ravi must have told George plenty of fascinating topics about Hinduism, Indian philosophy and holy sages and yogis such as Tat Baba*¹⁸, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Vevekananda and Yogananda. We know he presented then the book "*Autobiography of a Yogi*" by Yogananda.*¹⁹

On the 14th of September 1966 in the same year, George with his wife landed in Bombay as promised to learn sitar seriously. Having accepted Ravi's advice George disguised himself with a moustache and short cut hair instead of the trademark long hair, but this happy idea wasn't effective for more than 3 days. A hotel boy at Taj Mahal Hotel recognised him, so they ran away to Shrinagar in Kashmir where they could have some peaceful weeks for lessons and time for discussions. All the world now knew 'Sun' was a guru of a 'Beatle'.

Although six weeks means nothing for an orthodox training for any classical music, George was lucky enough to master important basic disciplines from possibly the best teacher.

In his lessons, I had George practice all the correct positions of sitting and some of the basic exercises. This was the most that one could do in six weeks, considering that a disciple usually spends years learning these basics. Even so, George came to understand the discipline involved, and since then he has realized how difficult it is to play the sitar and has said that it would take him forty years to learn to play it properly.*²⁰

The LP <Sgt. Pepper's> was a passable outcome of his uninterrupted practice after he

returned to London. Between two LP albums there lies such a pilgrimage to Indian music, and consequently it shows the difference between a rather awkward 'Norwegian Wood' and the freer and mellow 'Within You Without You'. After these lessons in India George had sittings time after time whenever possible in London or California as we know.

One episode proves how much he was concerned with Indian music for a certain period. He named his son 'Dhani' for which anyone who knows something about Indian music can guess why. George himself explained, "The name 'Dhani' actually came from my study of Indian music : from the scale of Sa-Ri-Ga-Ma-Pa-DHA-NI-Sa."*²¹

The affectionate friendship remained till George died from cancer 29th 11, 2001.

§ 3 Gat C / Influenced by Indian Music, What ?

On both George and Coltrane I would classify influences of Indian classical music into three aspects by which we can point out their philosophy of music and their music itself.

- (A) Metaphysics on Indian Music
- (B) Acoustics of Indian Music
- (C) Theory of Indian Music

§ 3-1 Metaphysics on Indian Music

We are sure that both of them must have read some philosophical books on Advaita-Vedanta philosophy written by Hindu saints such as Vivekananda and Yogananda who were very popular in America. It is well known that Vivekananda attended as a representative of Hindu religion at the first World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. His eloquent speech on Hinduism brought about enthusiastic recognition of Hinduism for the first time to Westerners.

Advaita-Vedanta philosophy is typically monism, that there exists ultimately *Brahman* as Ultimate Cause of the universe only. And this *Brahman* and *Ātman* as Spirituality of the individual are the one and the same, and this phenomenal world is just an illusion or a mirage projected by '*māyā*', the power of illusion-projection endowed in *Brahman* itself.

It is better to quote an explanation by Vivekananda himself to know what Advaita-Vedanta advocates though it is a little bit long.

According to the Advaita philosophy, then, this differentiation of matter, these phenomena, are, as it were, for a time, hiding the real nature of man ; but the latter really has not been changed at all. In the lowest worm, as well as in the highest human being, the same divine nature is present. The worm form in which the divinity has been more overshadowed by Maya ; that is the highest form in which it has been least overshadowed. Behind everything the same divinity is existing, and out of this

comes the basis of morality. Do not injure another. Love every one as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself ; in loving another, I am loving myself. From this also springs that principle of Advaita morality which has been summed up in one word --- self-abnegation. The Advaitist says, this little personalised self is the cause of all my misery. This individualised self, which makes me different from all other beings, brings hatred and jealousy and misery, struggles and all other evils. And when this idea has been got rid of, all struggles will cease, all misery vanish. and at that moment when he has become thus ready, the veil of ignorance falls away from him, and he is one with the universe. For a time, as it were, the whole of this phenomenal world will disappear for him and he will realise what he is. If a man is deluded by a mirage for some time, and one day the mirage disappears --- if it comes back again the next day at some future time, he will not be deluded. Before the mirage first broke, the man could not distinguish between the reality and the deception. But when it has once broken, as long as he has organs and eyes to work with, he will see the mirage, but will no more be deluded.The prison of misery has become changed into Sat, Chit, Ananda --- Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute --- and the attainment of this is the goal of the Advaita Philosophy.*²²

Here we will turn our eyes to the lyrics of 'Within You Without You' by George.*²³ The lyrics could be a brilliant introduction to the Advaita-Vedanta philosophy. The purport is exactly same as that which Vivekananda expounds only if some philosophical terms are substituted for the poetic words : For example, when George sings, "the people who hide themselves behind a wall of illusion never glimpse the truth", 'a wall of illusion' obviously indicates *māyā*, the power of illusion-projection and *Brahman* is meant by 'the truth'. Or, when he repeats sweetly 'love' and 'peace', he refers to *ānanda*, 'Bliss Absolute' according to Vivekananda's word. And the refrain that "life flows on within you without you" is exactly the poetic expression for the image that *prāṇa*, vital wind, links and vitalises both *Ātman* 'within you' as Microcosm and *Brahman* 'without you' as Macrocosm.

Though we cannot know what Ravi really talked about on the metaphysics of music to both George and Coltrane, we are able to guess it from what Ravi has written. It is the speculation on "*Nāda-Brahman*" (lit. Sound-Brahman) expounded even in some Upanishads, which developed along with the metaphysics of language and culminated in Kashmir Shaivism and the musicological tradition such as the authoritative work "*Saṅgītaratnākara*"*²⁴(the first half of 13c) by Śārṅgadeva.

Ravi explains Nada-Brahman theory in his own words :

In ancient scriptures we read that there are two types of sound -- the one a vibration

- of ether, the upper or purer air near heaven, and the other a vibration of air, or the lower atmosphere closer to the earth. The vibration of ether is thought by some to be like the music of the spheres that Pythagoras described in the sixth century B.C. It is the sound of the universe, ever present and unchanging. This sound is called *anāhata nād*, or “unstruck sound”, because it is not produced by any physical impact. The other kind of sound is called *āhata nād*, or “struck sound”, because it is always caused by physical impact. In this case, vibrations are set in motion at a given moment, a sound is created, and then it dies away as the vibrations cease.*²⁵

By ‘ancient scriptures’ Ravi refers to descriptions found in “*Maitri Upaniṣad*”, for example.

Now, it has elsewhere been said: ‘Verily, there are two Brahmas to be meditated upon: sound and non-sound. Now, non-sound is revealed only by sound.’ Now, in this case the sound-Brahma is Om. Ascending by it, one comes to an end in the non-sound. (6.22)*²⁶

Nāda-Brahman, namely, ‘*Brahman* as Ultimate Sound’ evolves the phenomenal world and all kinds of human activities including verbal activities and musical activities as phenomena of *Nāda*. In this respect “*Śaṅgītaratnākara*” says:

Vocal music has *Nāda* as essence, and instrumental music is praised on account of manifesting *Nāda*. Dance follows both. Therefore these three [i.e., vocal music, instrumental music and dance] depends on *Nāda*. The alphabet is manifested by *Nāda*, and the word consists of the alphabet. And the language consists of the word. And this daily activity is possible through the language. Therefore this phenomenal world has *Nāda* as the essence. (1.2.1-2)*²⁷

Further Ravi continues to explain the vital aspect of Nada-Brahman philosophy:

Our tradition teaches us that sound is God --- Nada Brahma. That is, musical sound and the musical experience are steps to the realization of the self. We view music as a kind of spiritual discipline that raises one’s inner being to divine peacefulness and bliss. We are taught that one of the fundamental goals a Hindu works toward in his life time is knowledge of the true meaning of the universe --- its unchanging, eternal essence --- and this is realized first by a complete knowledge of one’s self and one’s own nature. The highest aim of our music is to reveal the essence of the universe it reflects, and the ragas are among the means by which this essence can be apprehended. Thus, through music, one can reach God.*²⁸

Ravi mentions to the following idea in “*Śaṅgītaratnākara*”:

The worldly enjoyment could be attained through [concentration on Brahman] with

attributes, and emancipation through [concentration on Brahman] without attributes. For common people it is not easy to concentrate where the mind is one-pointedly attentive [to Brahman without attributes]. Therefore, sages contemplate, according to procedure instructed by preceptors, on beautiful unstruck sound (*anāhatanāda*), which is easier [than this] in this respect. Even this, being devoid of pleasingness, does not please the heart of common people. So we will describe the evolution of struck sound (*āhatanāda*), unfolding the whole of music that pleases people and liberates existence [from the metempsychosis] by means of micro intervals (*śruti*) etc., and also the nature of the cause of micro intervals etc. [of struck sound]. (1.2.164b-168a)*²⁹

It is this idea that must have given fresh inspiration and encouragement to Trane, for he had been struggling in the Civil Rights Movement and searching for what he could contribute as a musician. Music shares the essence with *Brahman*, which can persuade us of our ecstatic experience moved by genuine music and moreover music can be the means to achieve bliss. Though music is in the sphere of physically struck vibration (*āhatanāda*), it can be the means for liberation as well as for entertainment and soothing. Playing music can be a sort of religious deed and spiritual meditation to realise the essence of *Nāda-Brahman* amidst musical ecstasy.

Trane embellished 'A Love Supreme' with a beautiful poem, where Nada-Brahman philosophy is obviously expressed in the similar way that Advaita-Vedanta is described poetically in 'Within You Without You'.

Keep your eye on God.

God is. He always was. He always will be.

No matter what ... it is God.

He is gracious and merciful.

It is most important that I know Thee.

Words, sound, speech, men, memory, thoughts, fears and emotions ...

time ... all related ... all made from one ... all made in one.

Blessed be His name.

Thoughts waves ... heat waves ... all vibrations ... all paths lead to God.

Thank you God.*³⁰

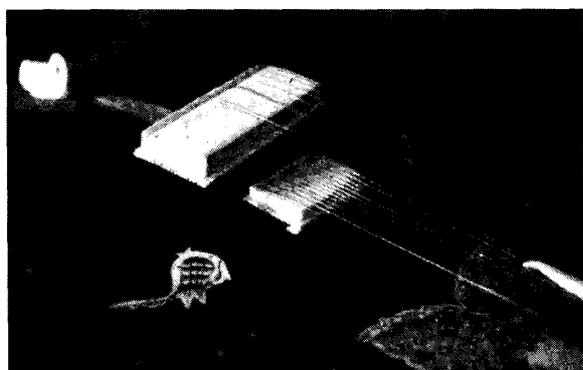
For Trane God is nothing but *Nāda-Brahman*, namely, 'Brahman as Primordial Vibration' from which everything evolves as verbal & nonverbal vibrations or musical & non-musical vibrations and to which everything is traceable.

§ 3-2 Acoustics of Indian Music

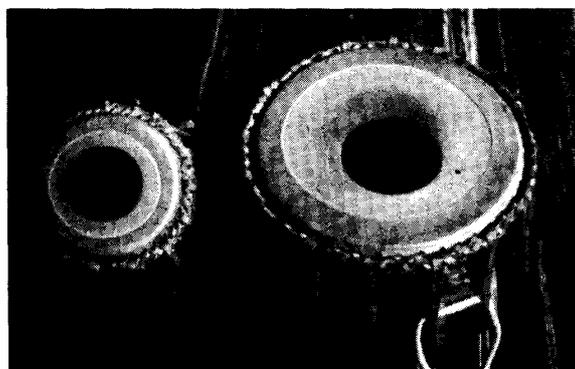
The acoustics of Indian instruments are so characteristic and impressive that we can never forget its sound only if we hear the sound once, say, of a sitar or a pair of tabla. Sound with a howl, a hum, resonance, harmonic overtones and even noise as well as uninterrupted sliding notes just like the natural human voice.

And we are surprised to find the structure of musical instruments with a special device to produce such acoustics. For instance, the sitar has two bridges. One for playing strings and sympathetic strings, and the surface of the main bridge for playing strings is delicately curved for the strings to produce buzzing effect by striking the bridge. This adjustment and the buzz itself are called '*javāri*'. Moreover, unlike the guitar, the sitar has arch shaped frets on which strings can be pulled down by an expert to produce uninterrupted sliding notes of up to a fifth, and also can be shaken freely. (Photo # 1)

Even a pair of tabla has a particular structure and device to produce the buzz and noise. The space between a rim and black paste patches of the goat skin surface of the smaller drum (*dāyān*) is called *maidān*, and the rim consists of upper and lower skins. Therefore, if we strike at the *maidān* with a snapping forefinger stroke, the buzz and harmonic overtones can be produced on account of vibration between upper skin and



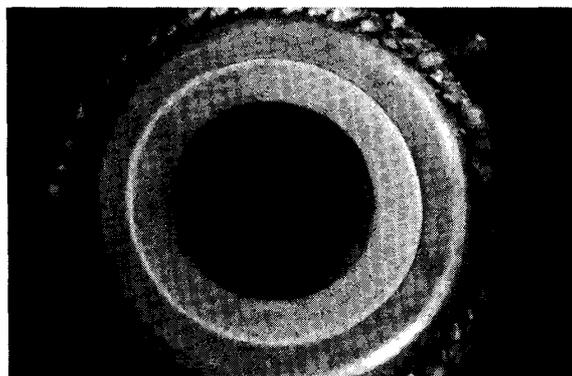
*Photo # 1 / Adjustment called '*javāri*' on the main bigger bridge on the sitar



*Photo # 2 / A pair of tabla (*dāyān* & *bāyān*)



*Photo # 3 / The rim of *dāyān*



*Photo # 4 / The rim of *bāyān*

lower skin. Moreover, to our amazement the bigger drum (*bāyān*) can produce even a characteristic 'sliding and shaking' sound on the skin surface by pressing with the heel of the palm and moving the lower palm on the surface. *³¹(Photo # 2,# 3,# 4)

An insistent Indian inclination for these peculiar sounds buzzing, sliding and shaking is due partly to cultural taste and partly of music metaphysics. It can be said there are broadly two types of culture regarding sound tonality: the culture of "Noise-Sound" characteristic in Indian classical music and the culture of "Pure-Sound" typically in Western classical music. Japanese traditional music considers it important to produce natural sound with noise on certain instruments such as the *Shaku-hachi* or the *Sha-mi-sen*. *³²

There is a metaphysical background that can explain this noise orientation. In the history of Indian music vocal music has been of the most prestigious, therefore a musician means first, a vocalist, and an instrumentalist is a synonym for an accompanist. In a sense, instrumental music became independent from accompaniment only after a legendary Allauddin Khan (1881-1972) who was a teacher and father-in-law of Ravi. So, great vocalists have been exclusively representative even up to today, such as Pt. Bhimsen Joshi (b.1922) and Pt. Jasraj (b.1930) in current Hindusthani (North Indian) style.

It is because the natural human voice has been regarded as the most essential and divine as it is furnished with characteristics such as the buzz, noise and a sliding & shaking sound. According to Nada-Brahman philosophy, vocal music is higher than any other musical activity, for human voices are vibrations created directly on the vocal cords by *prāna*, vital wind, which links vitally and cosmogonically, human beings as Microcosm (*Ātman*) and the universe as Macrocosm (*Brahman*) as explained before. Vocal music shares the essence with *Nāda-Brahman*. Therefore the human body is literally "a reed flute" inspired by divine expiration in contrast to Western way of thinking that regards human being as "a thinking reed".

In fact, "a reed-flute" is a favourite metaphor for Indian poets. We can find this out in the very first stanza of Rabindranath Tagore's "*Gītāñjali*", for example.

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carries over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new. *³³

§ 3-3 Theory of Indian Music

A vital key concept to understanding what Indian music aims at is the *rāga*. The *rāga* is the regulation for melody which determines not only purely musical aspects but also aesthetic aspects of melody. Raga regulation is, however, not arbitrary but omnipresent

in the universe according to the idea of correspondance of *Ātman* with *Brahman* through *prāṇa*. The *rāga* in the realm of physical vibration (*āhatanāda*) is not invented by us but found in the universe as the cosmic musical code existing in the realm of cosmic vibration (*anāhatanāda*).

At the same time the *rāga* means what is determined and actually rendered by a certain *rāga* with certain aesthetic characteristics. We shall confer to two definitions of the *rāga* in Maṅga's "*Brhaddeśi*" (c.750).

That which colours the mind of the good people by musical notes (*svara*) and melodic movement (*varṇa*) or the difference of sound (*dhvani*) is regarded as '*rāga*' by the wise.

Or. That which has special sounds (*dhvani*) adorned with musical notes (*svara*) and melodic movements (*varṇa*) and the agent colouring the mind of people is said to be '*rāga*'. (263-264)*³⁴

Rāga, it is said colours or dyes the mind of listeners, but by what? By certain aesthetic sentiments (*rasa*) and basic feelings (*bhāva*) inherent in each *rāga*. And again these aesthetic sentiments and feelings are cosmic sentiments latent within us. There are nine aesthetic sentiments: namely, (1) eros (*śṛṅgāra*), (2) mirth (*hāsyā*), (3) pathos (*karuṇā*), (4) fury (*raudra*), (5) heroic (*vīra*), (6) terror (*bhayānaka*), (7) odium (*bībhatsa*), (8) marvel (*adbhuta*) and (9) tranquillity (*sānti*). Each of these sentiments is the culmination of the corresponding basic feeling: namely (1) love (*rati*), (2) fun (*hāsa*), (3) sorrow (*śoka*), (4) anger (*krodha*), (5) vigour (*utsāha*), (6) fear (*bhaya*), (7) disgust (*jugupsā*), (8) surprise (*vismaya*) and (9) calmness (*sama*) respectively.

This is why the term *rāga* is adopted to denote this aesthetic aspect. The word *rāga* is a derived noun from the verb '*rañj*' to mean 'to dye' and it denotes commonly 'colour / love / emotion / anger'.

From our musical experiences, we understand that we need a certain time to be coloured or dyed by the mood aroused by music. Therefore performing one tune based on a certain *rāga* takes quite a long time in order to make latent basic feelings manifest and intensify them into aesthetic sentiments. Thus each *rāga* has traditionally been attributed to certain moods described in terms of aesthetic sentiments (*rasa*) and basic feelings (*bhāva*).

What is the *rāga* then as the regulation for melody? According to the Nada-Brahman theory, language and music are adjacent sound phenomena. Sounds (*dhvani*) are articulated for music into such musical notes (*svara*) as seven pure notes (*śuddhasvara*) and five varied notes (*vikṛtasvara*) in octaves, whilst sounds for language are articulated into vowels and consonants.

B.C. Deva expounds the *rāga* concept with the analogy of language and speech.

Speech is actual sound --- spoken and heard. But a language is an abstraction : a concept which is derived from speech. If one examines this question more closely, one will see that speech is first and fundamentally a flow of sound. Various kind of tones produced and heard are designated as vowels and consonants, and these are put together as words forming a language. The visual representation of these speech-sound is the orthography --- for example, the printed letter which you are reading. Analogously a melody is a flow of sound --- up and down, with various rhythmic distributions. When we abstract these characteristics and make a 'type', it becomes a 'raga' --- a 'musical language'. Here again, out of a stream of sound, 'notes' are created and named, and a particular arrangement of these 'notes' becomes a raga. A raga, then, may be defined broadly as a melodic scheme, characterised by a definite scale or notes (alphabet), order of sequence of these notes (spelling and syntax), melodic phrases (words and sentences), pauses and stases (punctuation) and tonal graces (accent).^{*35}

Seven pure notes are Sa (Do), Ri (Re), Ga (Mi), Ma (Fa), Pa (So), Dha (La) and Ni (Ti), and five varied notes are ri (♭ Re), ga (♭ Mi), ma (# Ma), dha (♭ Dha) and ni (♭ Ni). For example, Rāga 'Mālkauns' is traditionally described as under whilst terms in brackets are equivalent in language, and a dot above/ below solfa means 'in the upper'/ 'in the lower' octave : Ṇi = Ni in the lower octave, Śa = Sa in the upper octave and so on.

Rāga Mālkauns^{*36}

Notes [alphabets] : Sa, ga, Ma, dha, ni, Śa

Tonic [First Accent] : Ma

Subtonic [Second Accent] : Sa

Ascending Order of Notes [Characteristic of Spelling] : Sa ga Ma dha ni Śa

Descending Order of Notes [Characteristic of Spelling] : Śa ni dha Ma ga Ma Sa

Melodic Phrases [Words] : Sa-Ma-ga / Ma-ga-Ma-Sa / ni-dha-Ma / dha-ni-Śa / Ma-ga-Ma-dha/ ni-Śa / ni-dha-Ma-ga-Sa / etc. etc.

Playing Time [Context] : 1-4 am. in the midnight

Mood [Meaning Conveyed as Text] : Prayer, deep, peaceful and sublime. Humble abandon in the peace of the night. Surrender and spiritual love.

If expressed in terms of language, this description could be interpreted as follows : The words of text 'Malkauns' should be spelled by only five letters of the alphabet (Sa, ga, Ma, dha, ni). The order of the alphabet for spelling words has a loose rule, and the text consists of characteristic words (e.g. Sa-Ma-Ga) with certain accents (First accent on Ma & second accent on Sa). The text should be read or heard in a certain context (in the

$\dot{S}a$ ni ni - ni Sa / Pa Ma Ma - Ma Sa /

13

14

$\dot{S}a$ ni $\dot{S}a$ ni ni -Sa / Pa Ma Pa Ma Ma -- dha ni /

15

16

$\dot{S}a$ ni $\dot{S}a$ ni ni $f f$ Sa ga / Ma-Ma dha ni ni dha ga Ma dha ni /

1

$\dot{S}a$ - - f /

The first four measures we can regard as transposition of the mode diminished fourth below, which originals are as follows :

13

14

f ga dha ni ga - / ni dha ga dha ni ni -- ga ni dha ga dha /

15

16

ni -- ga ni dha ga dha ni - / $f f f f$ ni /

Theoretically here in the score, we can treat Pa after the tenth measure as an appoggiature, a kind of grace note, and consequently we will get the pentatonic mode of Sa, ga, Ma, dha and ni, exactly Rāga Mālkauns! Moreover, we realise that 'A Love Supreme' is the suite consisting of four parts whose total playing time is unusually more than thirty minutes like a raga performance. Listeners get readily coloured by the mood that each subtitle implies ; 'Acknowledgement' (Part I), 'Resolution' (Part II), 'Pursuance' (Part III) and 'Psalm' (Part IV).

I am sure that we could feel the mood of gratitude to God, surrender to God and love to God as praised in his poem if we listen to this number surrounded by the silent atmosphere of midnight.

We must remember here Trane's question to Ravi previously quoted that exposed Trane's ardent interest in the quality of Indian Music. "How can you create such peace, tranquility and spirituality in your music?" The very answer was 'A Love Supreme' based on Rāga Mālkauns as most suitable to express these moods, which is one of the most dignified ragas only acknowledged musicians are allowed to sing or play in India proper.

§ 4 Jhālā (Cadenza)

We have seen so far why George and Coltrane got interested in, and how they were initiated into, and what they learned from Indian classical music, and we have found Ravi played a very important role as a guide to the world of Indian philosophy on music and of music itself. Depending upon their concerns, the content and extent of influence from Indian music naturally differs.

Firstly, both had such an intense interest in Indian philosophy that their life styles and their motivations towards music were obviously Indian-orientated.

And George first had an interest in the acoustics of the sitar with typically Indian characteristics, and he readily adopted Indian instruments like a pair of tabla, tambura (a drone) or sarangi (a bow instrument) for his compositions of 'Norwegian Wood', 'Love You To' or 'Within You Without You'. On the other hand, Trane never used any Indian instruments for his jazz though his way of blowing his instrument had recognisably something in common with Indian acoustic.

George did not compose his music based on Raga theory, but Trane fully rendered several tunes resorting to Raga theory in a way that few can recognise. Nobody has explained so far concretely the *rāga*-influenced portion of his music, though many critics mentioned it and commented on the influence by Raga theory. This is because none of the jazz critics truly knew Raga theory.

Finally, it has proved that their interests were not the measles nor trendy fashion. Coltrane lived a Hindu saint of a life and died at the age of forty leaving some posthumous works on the same lines with 'A Love Supreme'. And we know that some of his admirers converted into Hinduism as message carriers like Carlos Santana and Mahavishnu John MacLaughlin who dedicated to Coltrane their collaborated LP <Love Devotion Surrender> (1975) including 'A Love Supreme'.

On the other hand, George kept a keen interest in India till he died last year as he himself confessed :

When I went to India, I had a desire to know about the yogis. So it was like a parallel interest for me : Indian music and the yogis of the Himalayas were both high on my agenda at that time—and they still are now. The great thing for me is that I latched onto that when I was twenty-two years old, and it's been consistent right through for the last thirty years. A lot of people might have thought it was a trendy thing—and for some people it was only a trend—but for me, I knew it had a certain intensity, and there was a certain intensity to my desire to pursue that.*³⁷

George had been a 'repeater' (who fascinatedly visits the same country again and again), to India and left instructions in his last will to return his ashes to the holy river Ganga in India as reported in the mass media.

NOTES

- *1 Hisamitsu Noguchi, Liner note for LP <A Love Supreme>, IMP-88060
- *2 Hideki Sato, Liner note for LP <Om>, IMP-88142
- *3 From 1981 to 1984, I had an opportunity to live and study in India. There under the guidance of Prof. S.K. Saxena (Baroda University) I mastered how to play tabla and learned the theory of Indian music enough to appreciate Coltrane's music properly.
- *4 Ravi Shankar, *My Music My Life*, New Delhi, 9th Impression of Indian Ed. 1982 (Abbr. *My Music My Life*); Ravi Shankar & George Harrison (Ed. and Introduced), *Raga Mala-The Autobiography of Ravi Shankar*, Element Books, Guildford (UK), 1999 (Abbr. *Ragamala*)
- *5 *Ragamala*, p.195
- *6 *Ragamala*, p.148
- *7 The term *gat* means a small fixed composition serving as a main theme in the Rondo-like structure of Indian music.
- *8 *Ragamala*, p.149
- *9 *Ragamala*, p.167
- *10 *Ragamala*, p.176
- *11 *Ragamala*, p.176-178
- *12 *Ragamala*, p.178
- *13 *Ragamala*, p.178
- *14 *Ragamala*, p.189
- *15 *Ragamala*, p.189
- *16 *Ragamala*, pp.189-190
- *17 *Ragamala*, p.190
- *18 Tat Baba was a Hindu saint who had the supernatural power even to metamorphose into a parrot, and he became the mentor of Ravi. Cf. *My Music My Life*, pp.79-81
- *19 Hindu saint Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952) who came to the USA in 1920 and gained so great a popularity that he established his own institute "Self-Realization Fellowship" SRF in California.
- *20 *My Music My Life*, p.93
- *21 *Ragamala*, p.229
- *22 Advaita Ashrama (Ed.), *Abridged Edition of the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta, 1985, pp.88-89
- *23 Cf. the Beatles, LP <Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band>, OP-8163, for all the lyrics.
- *24 Cf. Funatsu, Kazuyuki, 'The Metaphysics of Music in Saṅgītaratnākara', "Dr.Sengaku Mayeda Felicitation Volume : Ga no Shiso", Shunjusha, Tokyo (in Japanese), 1991, for detailed discussion on "Saṅgītaratnākara".
- *25 *My Music My Life*, p.17 : Ravi had enough knowledge about ancient musicological texts such as "Nāṭyaśāstra", "Bṛhaddeśī" and "Saṅgītaratnākara". Cf. *My Music My Life*, pp.44-45
- *26 Hume, Robert Ernest, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, London, 7th Impression 1968, p.437
- *27 S. Subrahmanya Sastri (Ed.), *Saṅgītaratnākara of Śārṅgadeva*, Vol. I-Adhyaya I, Madras,

1943, p.22 (Abr. SR)

*28 *My Music My Life*, p.17

*29 SR, pp.61-62

*30 Cf. John Coltrane, LP <A Love Supreme>, IMP-88060, for all the poem. Cf. Berendt, Joachim Ernst, Nada Brahma. *Die Welt ist Klang*, Frankfurt an Main, 1983 (Oshima, Kaori (Japanese trans.), *Sekai wa Oto*, Jinbun Shoin, 1986) for interesting discussion on the concept *Nāda-Brahman* and jazz including Coltrane.

*31 Cf. Funatsu, Kazuyuki, '*Kāyḍā Form of Ajrādā Gharānā*', "Toho", Vol.7, (in Japanese), 1991, for further information on a pair of tabla.

*32 It is very interesting to know the structure of Shamisen called '*sawari*' (lit. 'a touch') that is meant for producing the buzz effect. The end of the neck of *Shamisen* has a groove, and the first string is taken off from the bridge, whilst the other two strings remain on it, and stretched over the groove. As this Japanese device '*sawari*' sounds like the Indian device '*javāri*', some scholars even insist that '*sawari*' has its root in Indian '*javāri*'. Cf. Miner, Allyn, *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Delhi, 1997, p.235, Note 44.

*33 Rabindranath Tagore, *Gītāñjali : Song Offerings, A Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author from the Original Bengali*, The Macmillan Company of India, New Delhi, 1980, p.1

*34 Sharma, Prem Lata (Ed.), *Brhaddeśi of Śri Matāṅga Muni*, Vol.II, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, 1994, p.76

*35 Deva, B.C., *An Introduction to Indian Music*, New Delhi, 1981, pp.4-5; Cf. Funatsu, Kazuyuki, '*An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication with Reference to Indian Art Forms*', "Studies in Humanities: Culture and Communication, Faculty of Arts, Shinshu University", No.33, 1999. for further discussion on the *rāga*.

*36 Cf. Chaudhury, V. Roy, *Rāg Vyākaraṇ*, (in Hindi), New Delhi, 1981, pp.440-1; Danielou, Alain, *The Rāga-s of Northern Indian Music*, New Delhi, 1980, pp.324-5; Funatsu, Kazuyuki, '*Rasa Theory and Rāga Theory*', "Dr.Jikido Takasaki Felicitation Volume: Indogaku Bukkyogaku Ronshu", Shunjusha, (in Japanese), Tokyo, 1987, for detailed descriptions about Rāga Mālkauns.

*37 *Ragamala*, p.195

(31/10/2002)