

Expostulation and Reply

A READER from Madras, has sent a note on 'Raga Bhava,' from which we quote:

"To render a raga in its true form one must be well versed with its 'bhava'; that is, its individuality which makes it to be recognised as such and such raga. Of course, the raga form has been fixed by tradition, and naturally it follows that the 'bhava' associated with the raga resides in the form it has been fixed. Each raga has its own 'arohana and avarohana' (prescribed notes in the ascending and descending scale) which is only a skeleton form. The 'bhava' is the flesh and blood and the clothing, to give it a definite recognisable form and beauty. The musician must know apart from the 'arohana and avarohana' the relationship of each 'swara' to that of its neighbour, as well as with other 'swaras' occurring in each raga, its range of 'ghamaka' and several other factors which tend to give a precise shape to the raga. For example, though all the swaras except the 'ma' are the same in the ragas Sankarabharana and Kalyani, we have very distinct form of manipulating those swaras individually and in conjunction with other swaras, so as to give a perfect shape, distinguishable from each other, even in a single given phrase. There are several examples to prove that a swara takes different forms in different ragas in which it occurs to bring out the individual identity of the raga to which it belongs. This characteristic feature may be called the 'raga bhava.' So on account of its peculiar nature, which cannot be explained in written form, it could only be learnt by hearing it sung by a musician, who has learnt it from his 'guru' and so on. This is the simple reason for the necessity of a 'guru' in imparting this 'bhava' to his pupil. (In this context, 'bhava' cannot be taken to mean 'rasa,' or to be found in 'bhakti,' which belong to two different fields.) The 'guru' is there to teach his disciple the 'bhava' of a raga by his demonstration, enriching it with his 'kalpanas' (which he has gained through his long practice and experience), and the disciple is expected to follow the tradition and expand his knowledge through his own efforts and enriching his elaborations according to his capacity, without in any way impairing the original 'raga bhava' which he has learnt from his guru! Thus the style of enriching a raga and elaborating it may vary from musician to musician, even from 'guru' to his disciple, since it belongs to the

realm of one's own intelligence, imagination and capacity, whereas the 'raga bhava' remains the same through the ages."

The reader has written the above note in the hope that it will dispel any doubt about the misunderstood idea of bhava, which he discovers in the article 'Sterile Devotion,' (S. W., 24 July). While thanking him for his lucid note, we would like to point out where exactly we differ from him.

In the first place, the reader has referred to the 'raga bhava' as a function of swara relations. We could not have agreed with him more. But while he anthropomorphises this 'raga bhava' into flesh and blood, and even clothing (shades of Carlyle!) we have merely pointed out that even these can be reduced to a matter of microtones, and that any superiority claimed for the 'ragas' over the Western 'scales' must be based on the belief that the microtone *per se* is superior to a 'note of equal temper.'

Secondly, the reader has pointed out why a 'guru' is necessary. He seems to feel, an adequate system of notation which could indicate the relevant gamakas along with the swaras ('written form') is not possible and so a 'guru' would be necessary. If a 'guru' were only the substitute for an effective musical notation, it will not be very difficult, with our present knowledge of semeiology, to invent an adequate musical notation to cover 'gamakas' also in addition to 'swara' and 'tala.' Actually, the great conductors in the West, read from the score not only the notes and the beats, but also the intentions of the composer regarding the way in which they wish them to be articulated in the recital.

Thirdly, the reader has tried to point out how the 'raga bhava' is kept intact, even when it is handed down from teacher to disciple. Each generation may add its own marginal frills to the 'raga bhava' but "the 'raga bhava' remains the same through the ages." Our concern, during the past few weeks, has been to show that the 'raga bhava' has continued to be the same from one generation to another, not so much because it has been so handed down, but because the succeeding generations have not questioned the

By Gum!



Cartoon by Mickey Patel]

assumptions of the culture which produced the concept of the 'raga.' As with so many of the concepts which the 'nagaraka' culture produced, all the modifications of the basic assumptions of the 'nagaraka' culture have been changes not of substance but on the surface. As maintained by the reader and many others of his persuasion, the 'raga bhava' is a matter of self-sufficient and interrelated ideas, independent of the singer and his approach to life. It is the Hindu version of art for art's sake. But this idea of 'raga bhava' is not true to our understanding of life at present, for the simple reason that many of the assumptions of the 'nagaraka' culture are inadequate to the understanding of the human condition as it is understood today.

The reader has felt that our use of the word 'bhava' was a mistake. He has further pointed out that 'bhava' is not the same as 'rasa' and that 'bhakti' has nothing to do with either. In reply we have to state that by 'bhava,' we did not refer to 'raga bhava,' at least not in the sense in which he has used the word; that in the sense in which we have used it, the word 'bhava' represents the emotion which a raga portrays, the mood which it expresses, and the word, 'rasa' represents the correlative mood which it evokes in the listener. It seems defensible to use the word 'bhava' to denote expression and 'rasa' to denote reception, making them the two terminals of a single experience. When we had referred to 'bhava' as another word for 'rasa,' it is in this sense we had meant it. Again, it has been claimed by musicians and musicologists that Indian music is basically the expression of 'bhakti'. 'Bhakti' is an attitude of the mind in which a 'bhava' is expressed—and this 'bhakti' is also felt as a 'rasa' at the receiving end. For a long time, 'bhakti' has served for religion, philosophy, psychology, cosmology and sociology. We feel that this concept of 'bhakti' which, with all its overtones of these separate disciplines, was derived from the world view of the Puranas, has been overworked and to that extent has become amorphous. It has been made to mean so much that it has ultimately come to mean very little. We feel that some of this amorphousness has passed into our idea of the 'raga' also, with the result that the discreteness of the 'swara' has been lost sight of. Losing sight of it has not been altogether a gain.

It is further our thesis that the raga being the form limiting the functions of the 'swaras' of which it is composed, it should not be looked upon as being fixed independently of those functions; that the functions of the swaras are not merely the fixed relationships between swaras but that they are fundamental musical events which the musicians create, and to this extent they are the index of the art of the musician; that in the way in which the musicians create these events, they not only conform to a predetermined form of the raga, but actually create that form anew; that criticism of music should admit this fact of musical creation and not of any fancied conformity to tradition as the factor to which critical judgment should direct its attention; that this freedom of creation gives, within the broad outline of the raga, enough scope for musicians to be individual; that much of their creativity hinges upon the discreteness of their experience which, in turn, enables them to handle the swaras with a personal understanding; that it is this way of handling the swaras which may be called the style of their music.

It is also our understanding that in the sense in which we understand the raga and the swara, the functions which the swaras represent belong to a tradition, not to tradition as an idea or institution impaled on custom but as a contact with origins. In the understanding of swaras as functions, the artist has the freedom to exploit the entire tradition of functions in which the swaras could trace their origins and development. This view of tradition does not stop with the period of the 'nagaraka' culture and to the function which that culture prescribed to the swaras, but goes back to even earlier cultural situations, and derives its values from those situations too.

AEOLUS

FEIFFER

I'M VERY PROUD OF MY LATEST CARTOON CHIEF

A VERY STRONG COMMENT, BUT HAVEN'T I SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT BEFORE?

YOU MEAN THIS ONE— WHEN I WAS CONCERNED THAT EXTREMIST TACTICS WOULD LOSE THE NEGRO HIS MANY WHITE FRIENDS?

POWERFUL! BUT HAVEN'T I SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT BEFORE?

YOU MEAN THIS ONE— WHEN I WAS FEARFUL THAT IRRESPONSIBLE ACTIONS WOULD ENDANGER THE PASSAGE OF CORRECTIVE CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION?

BOY THAT REALLY SAYS IT— BUT HAVEN'T I SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT BEFORE?

YOU MEAN THIS ONE— WHEN I WONDERED IF TRYING TO MOVE TOO FAST WOULDN'T THREATEN THE GREAT STRIDES THE NEGRO PEOPLE HAD ALREADY MADE?

A BEAUTY! BUT HAVEN'T I SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT BEFORE?

YOU MEAN THIS ONE— WHEN I JUST COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THESE PEOPLE WANTED?

A CLASSIC! BUT HAVEN'T I SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT BEFORE?

YOU MEAN THIS OLD ONE?

BOY ONE PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS.

© 1966 JULES FEIFFER