



A Southern Music: The Karnatic Story

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This is really a remarkable book written by a brilliant artist. The experience and philosophy of a committed musician has brought authenticity to the saga of creativity discussed in the book. Academic discipline in the analysis of the importance of experience, context and history of art experience provides the strong framework to the book. The twenty seven chapters spread across 560 pages and the Bibliographical details and Index prove that this is a classic work under taken by a true research scholar.

Vidwan T M Krishna is well known name in Karnatik Music. His concerts have won the appreciation of many and a few apprehensions also, for the creativity in him wanted to broaden the conventional framework of a concert. The rationality of his creative thinking is being shared in this book. The headings of the first three chapters - Music: A Narrative, The Intent of Music and Imagination, Creativity, Improvisation, respectively – set the tone of the whole book. These three chapters also provide a strong foundation to the art related discussion in the book. For example - T M Krishna opines on the tradition like this : “Tradition is not a repetitive act; it is change that retains within it the essential threads that define the whole.” [Pp 11-12]. At the same time he acknowledges, “Conventions are also generated due to social, religious and political influences , necessitated by the need for acceptability within a context.” Therefore, he argues that various arts interact with tradition, individuals, socio-political milieu. Thus, he undoubtedly convinces the reader about the need to redefine the intent, imagination and creativity in art.

In page 38, he explores the complex relationship among experience, understanding, skill and creativity and confesses –“...life as a whole

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is a stimulus for creativity.”[pp 38]. This holistic approach towards art itself is the unique feature of T M Krishna that distinguishes him from the other artists. Another very interesting observation is that whatever he observes about creativity in music is also true about other forms of art. Thus, the intent of this book, especially the first three chapters, goes beyond Karnatik music and it embraces all the art forms in the world. Those who are interested in any one of the art forms must study these chapters to hone and improvise their ideas.

TMK seem to be revolutionary when he writes, “Our perception of folk art is purely social and is class-based.”[pp 21]. But it is the observation of a creative artist who has studied anthropology and who has understood the complex relationship between the evolution of both -mankind and art. As a result, he advises, “A superficial observation of these arts would lead us to untrue and simplistic conclusions” [pp 31]. To give justice to the reading of this book, we need to understand the intricacies involved in the concepts, such as imagination and creativity. If so, this book can certainly lead us towards new vistas of thoughts.

Chapter 4 onwards the Fundamentals of Karnatik Music such as : Svara, Gamaka, Raga, Time, Tala, evolution of musical compositions, various forms of compositions, historical perspectives on the structure of concerts, details of music festivals/Sabhas are discussed. He also elaborates about the myths such as cast, religion, language, nationality which are claimed to have a significant role in internalizing nuances of Karnatik Music [which could be true with other art forms also].

In the Book-2 “The Context”, TMK relates Music with other forms of art in the present scenario. He even discusses the role of technology in promoting the interests of Music. The interesting observation about this book is that it denies all the “ivory tower” concepts and makes the art more centered around ordinary human activities. In the last part Book-3 “The History”, TMK traces the history of Music from Bharatha's *Naryashastra* up to present day. Here various stages of development, contribution of eminent composers, adaptation of western musical instruments into Karnatik Music, status of Music under various rulers in India, fine distinction between *Marga* and

Desi, etc., are discussed. The lucid language, symbolic style, sharp and focused analysis and convincing argument in the book demonstrate that the writer has exploited the aesthetics of the language to its fullest extent. All in all, it could be said that the book is a long narrative, meditation and intuition on the Art/Music related issues. Both in content and form this is a torch-bearer kind of work that pleads us to explore the unexplored corners of creativity and art. In the last paragraph of the book TMK requests the reader, to “...agree, disagree, argue, fight, battle with the ideas here, but a fellow seeker” but not to keep quiet. Thus the book demands a serious attention from the art-loving readers.

Throughout the book TMK acknowledges the original sources/references and provides a detailed bibliography for the benefit of the interested readers. It is not an exaggeration if one considers that this is an important book in the world of music and art that elevates the readers to the heights hitherto unknown. Because of all these reasons it could be claimed as a “must read” book.