

Singing the *malhaar* in monsoon is an attempt at creating a mood and establishing an organic bond that existed between Man and Nature

Singing in the rain

Traditionally in the monsoons, *malhaars* are sung. It is commonly believed that the *malhaars* have the capacity to influence the elements to such an extent that it begins to respond to their tune. This assumption that tonal structure of *malhaar* is expected to bring rain is challenged in this day and age of rationality. The relationship of nature with sound, unless scientifically spelt out, remains a myth or at best a commonly held belief.

But ironically the important point to note is the underlying assumption that a certain sequence of notes can influence Nature. An organic link between the various manifestations in Nature, whether it be in the form of a human body or in the form of elements, is obviously the result of a universe which is integrated and where Man is not alienated. He forms very much a central part of the larger scheme of creation.

Our musical system and its legends are all related to the worldview that it is one large whole where the sphere of individual activities do not operate individually but at some level are linked in a way that we are still unaware of.

And there are a great many varieties of *malhaars*. The most celebrated of course being *Mian ki Malhaar* accredited to Mian Tansen, and also *Megh* and *Malhaar*, sung together as one *raag* with tremendous appeal. Some of the greatest names in our music like Ramdas and Surdas have crafted their own *malhaars* and Mirabai, who sang it to douse the fire that scalded Tansen after he had sung *Dipak* to prove to Akbar that his music had the power to move Nature is the most dramatic. There are



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music

Tansen after he had sung Dipak to prove to Akbar that his music had the power to move Nature is the most dramatic. There are other malhaars like Gaur Malhaar and many more, which in recent times have been the creative innovations of musicians who wanted to enlarge the scope of their creative expression.

Most of these are legends and should be treated as such as they flow from a common fund of mythology where the world was viewed not from the analytical

eyes of a scientist but from the integrative vision of a sage. One needn't go into the veracity and scientific verification

of these legends because one will totally be on the wrong trail.

In the ancient treatises both on music and the other art forms, the appeal lay in the aesthetic emotion — *rus* that a work of art could create. If a work of art was without *rus* it had no artistic validity or worth. *Rus* was further divided into various aesthetic emotions which the artist was supposed to aspire to create in order to make his work appealing.

It was also a commonly held belief that every note has its own particular aesthetic emotion and by playing or singing the right note it was possible to evoke a particular emotion. It went even further because the actual repositories of these aesthetic emotions were the *shrutees* or the microtones and the correct application of the microtones was the guarantee for evoking the desired emotion.

This integrative assumption was also obvious in other explanations of characteristics of music and its relationship with time. There were laid down prin-

ciples as to which raag was supposed to be sung at what time, and what aesthetic impression it created. And then there was the most nebulous relationship between musical sound and the state of human emotion. It was and is not possible to say that a certain composition can create happiness and a certain composition creates gloom.

Since music does not have a designative connotation it is the most difficult of the arts to comprehend. It may be felt and lived but it defies a logical rational explanation of how it works and how are the human emotional structures affected by it. At best we have images whether visual or in parables as explanations.

As the advance of industri-

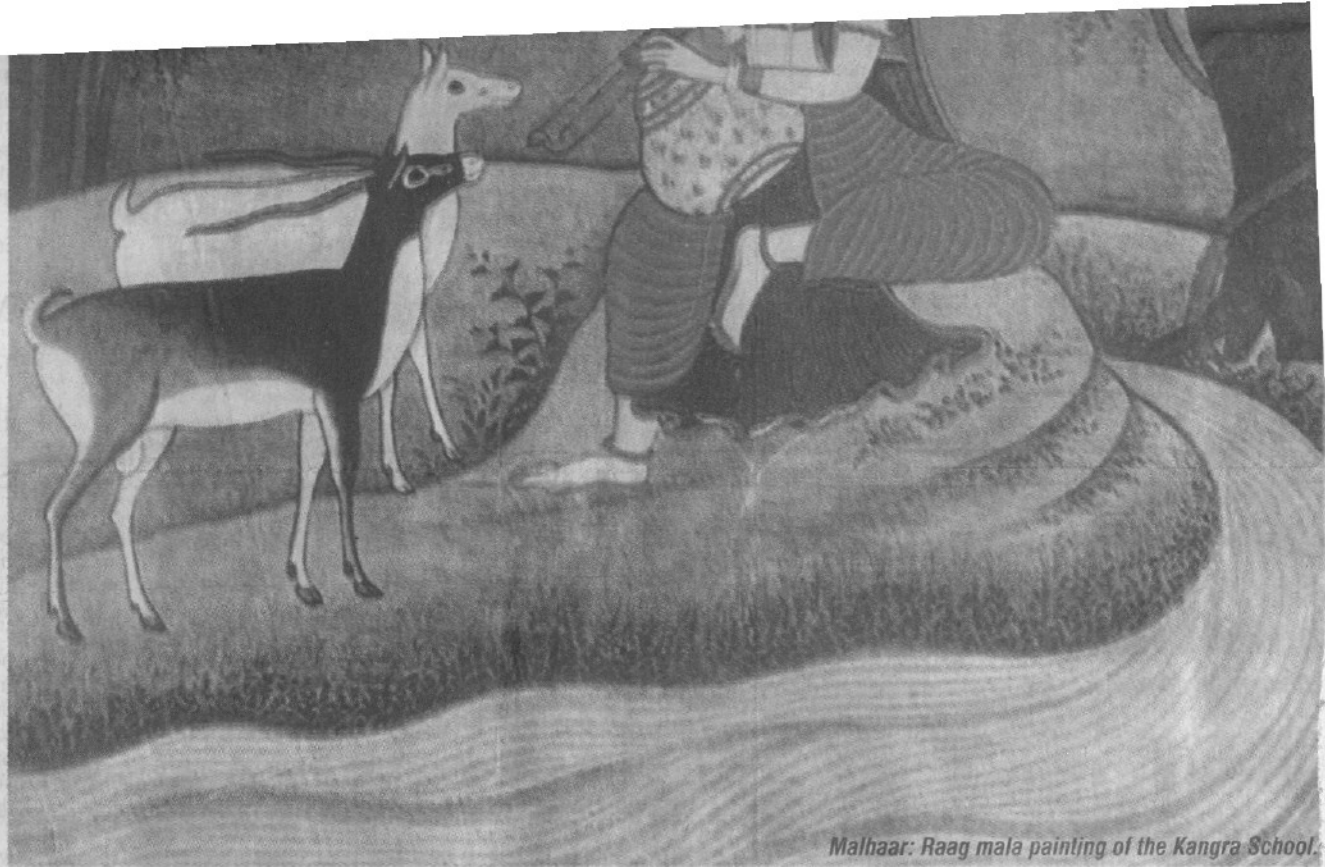
alised civilisation took a decisive leap in Europe, the Romantic Movement was a rebellion against the ideology that insisted on dissecting the world. 'Back to Nature' was the motto of the Romantics, as it promoted a vision to integrate Man with his environment. This was easier conceived in the countryside as it existed before its wholesome conquest and enslavement. The great classical tradition of European music too was indebted to this Romantic Movement which still yearned for a universe that was integrative and had a central place for Man in it. But it seemed to be a losing battle as Man finally was alienated to become an outsider in his own world.

'There was no providence in the fall of a sparrow', and as atonality in music became reflective of the disinherited and displaced man, the classical tradition gradually gave way to music that spoke of the fragmented self where one was trying to find expression in relation to his own self and not in reference to a larger reality.

In our part of the world, the artistic fallout was the unhinging of the *raag* from its emotional source. It could be sung as an independent entity not necessarily following the rules that had established its ambience. The next step was to treat the raag as an independent entity, only as a sequence of notes which could be creatively tampered with to

create a mood irrespective of its original laid down emotional framework. And from there started the dissociation of the composition from the aesthetic emotion of the raag.

Gradually building a mood and then exploring it through the infinite varieties of tonal combinations was the process of *raag-dari*, but now singing the malhaar in monsoon is an attempt at creating that mood and establishing that organic bond that existed between Man and Nature. It is no longer the reflection of a given state where the integral relationship already existed — only an attempt at finding a local habitation and a name for the disinherited and displaced souls.



Malhaar: Raag mala painting of the Kangra School.