

Here are three inside glimpses of the East. The first explains the Oriental conception of time in terms of Hindu music. The second records the musings of a Buddhist pilgrim. The third describes the suicide epidemic in Japan.

The Orient UNVEILED

A FAR EASTERN
SYMPOSIUM

I. MUSIC EAST AND WEST

By RENÉ DAUMAL

Translated from the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Paris Literary Monthly

TIME is man's great enemy, against which he fights a deathly struggle from his birth. The consciousness of pure time, devoid of content, is intolerable. Only try for just a minute to pay attention to time passing and to nothing else. If you succeed you are an exception. Western man tries to kill time by every method, filling it with sensations, emotions, reasoning, various activities, or, much more commonly, with automatic actions that take the place of everything else and permit him to sleep twenty-four hours a day yet maintain the appearance of a fairly well regulated human mechanism. He invents calendars and clocks to transform the pitiless duration that

is the form his life takes into a mathematical kind of time that is simply an objective natural law foreign to his own intimate senses. Frequently, however, all these veils that he has thrown over the reality of time reveal themselves as vain illusions. Duration makes itself wearily felt in the cruel form of boredom.

Generally speaking, the Oriental has chosen another method of attack; I mean the thinking Oriental, the conscious Oriental. Such a man is even more of an enemy to the imperialist, colonizing West than he claims to be. The Western type to whom I contrast him is the bourgeois Occidental, who is the victim twice over of his

traditions and dogmas, since he not only has to submit to them but has to keep strengthening them to maintain himself in power. The Oriental does not try to kill time by going to sleep in a thousand different ways, each one a different form of suicide. By living time instead of killing it he identifies himself with it and annihilates it in his own consciousness. Contrary to the usual belief, it is the Oriental who knows best how to live and how to assimilate immediate reality, and not the Occidental, whose ingenuity is confined to escaping from reality down numberless side roads.

Now music moves in duration. It is a measure of duration and, like duration, it consists of an irreversible succession. Therefore any form of music is concrete time, audible time. It is a marvelous instrument that enables us to seize hold of impalpable time. It is therefore inevitable that the Westerner and the Easterner should both use music to combat this old enemy, each in his own way. The contrast between their two ways of fighting against time are to be found in the musical traditions of the two civilizations.

The truth is that Oriental music bores any purely Western spirit. Instead of disguising the redoubtable devourer of man behind a beautiful sequence of sounds, instead of distracting one, Oriental music keeps bringing one back to the consuming obsession of time. It is always insistently recalling a sad consciousness of duration. The Westerner, on the other hand, seeks in his music a sonorous procession that reclothes and dissembles duration. The musicians of India, and perhaps all Oriental musicians, want sound only in order to

emphasize silence. Thus, as Lao-Tsze has said, 'Ten spokes come together to form the hub of a wheel, but it is the hollow centre that permits the wheel to be used. In like manner, a vase is useful not because of the thickness of its sides, but because of the empty space they inclose.' Oriental music endeavors above all else to sculpture successive moments of silence out of duration and the listener relishes each of these moments as the substance of his own life, of his own unhappy consciousness of being limited and confined within his individual skin.

The word 'listen' has two very different meanings according to whether it refers to the one or the other of these two forms of sound. The Occidental derives a double pleasure from music, melodic and harmonic. Let me first discuss the former. In the most fortunate case, when the melody is not simply a low satisfaction of instincts and passions that are aroused and then agreeably calmed by the power of successful noises, what the Western listener chiefly admires is the clever solution of a problem raised by the musician. (May I say that I am not considering in this discussion certain Western musicians—of whom the last and greatest was Bach—who pursued aims foreign to the normal mentality of their civilization?) The first measure brutally breaks silence. *Fiat sonus*, and the sound is separated from silence. The equilibrium is broken and the germ of the melodic world, with all its laws, has already appeared in the first measure. To achieve his glory as a creator the musician must develop this germ until he reestablishes the equilibrium of the original silence after various incidents and repeti-

tions. But from the very start one law is imposed on this development of sound. The first break of silence provokes a second, then a third, and so on.

This unfolding of creative power can, when a genius is at work, make your whole skin tingle with the sensation of sublimity. Usually I prefer to look coldly at the listener, who is anxiously suspended on the melodic theme and asking himself every minute how the musician is going to extricate himself from the difficulty into which he has thrown himself, and who sighs with satisfied admiration when finally the succession of sonorous equations is resolved by art into the final silence. Time has been conquered. The reality that is concealed by the melody which he admires is that of an individual will strong enough to impose itself across duration.

ASIATIC man has nothing to do with this kind of art. To the Hindu, in particular, melodic problems have been solved for centuries. The individualism of the Western artist who wants to surpass himself by creating the image of a personal god of his own has no standing in the East. An ancient tradition has limited the number of musical themes, or, one should say, musical colorations—if one may attempt to translate the untranslatable word, '*rag*.' The technique of the *rag* or coloration is minutely governed by very precise and complicated laws. Every *rag* is identified with some hour of the day, some season of the year, some state of the soul. It is male or female and has this or that color. The *rags* are also identified

with direct mythological subjects that are often represented in the plastic arts as living creatures. This does not astonish the Hindu, whose Vedic hymns were visualized by the ancient *risbis*, but it may disconcert the Western musician or listener. Yet he should listen to Hindu music if he wants to understand what a miraculous use the Hindu has been able to make of these traditional theories.

He will realize that the musician makes use of *rags* as a poet uses words, which have a fixed grammatical form but which develop an infinite network of suggestiveness when uttered from his mouth. But the *rag* is even more subtle. By taking just one of these themes governed by ancestral rules and repeating it with free variations and interlacing the *rag* with himself, the musician can achieve the true object of his art: he can express moments of silence to which the traditional theme has lent a definite color that enables every listener to savor its atmosphere of suffering more concretely.

Each of these themes has a universally human simplicity—evening, morning, spring, night. I believe that a really and truly Western Westerner cannot stand the sensation of feeling naked and alone in the eternal noon, or in a nocturnal twilight that never ends, that returns pitilessly ten times a minute, lengthening out each twang of the stringed instrument into an eternity of boredom. But if he is able to identify himself by an act of love with the Hindu listener, with the music, or with the Hindu musician, if he has the courage to face his own solitude, he will hear a new and unexpected music, but with something quite different from his fleshly ear.

Every measure returns to silence every minute, and in each silence he finds himself alone, face to face with himself, always at the same moment. Duration, being resolved into identical instants, vanishes by virtue of a single conscious act. Man grasps himself for what he is in the concrete presence of the instant. Another kind of melody is born, not from the succession of notes, but from the relations between these moments of silence. This explains the impression, often received by Occidentals, of a music developing in a new dimension of time that imposes its rules not only on physical existence but on a more subtle, intimate form of existence. And, furthermore, it is impossible to set down the essentials of the Hindu *rag* by means of our system of musical notation.

Musical tradition in India is well aware that a given *rag* should put the listener in a condition to lay hold of himself in the bare reality of his immediate existence. The *rag* is therefore a form of truth. Its whole meaning exists only when it is played in the moment for which it was conceived. Keyserling, a typical Westerner who is interested in the Orient, tells of visiting the Tagores to hear a little of their native music: "Yesterday, when I expressed a desire to have a summer theme played on a winter evening, the musicians at first appeared nervous, for it seemed to them impossible." The suggestive power of the music was such that under its influence the philosopher-count wrote down several very true observations on the subtle art of the *rag*. Hindu music, by its connection with the concrete individual, once again accomplished on that evening the real end of all music,

which is to make man conscious of himself.

The same difference exists between the function of instrumental harmony in a Western and an Eastern orchestra. To the Westerner, harmony is defined subjectively by its agreeable character. 'Agreeable' means that which pleases the body, puts the organism at peace, and permits the passions to repose in the slumber of repression. Western harmony is agreeable, it numbs the senses. It assures the listener of calm or of mild and pleasing instinctual activity, and it gives the melody a kind of body or passionate substance. When the same man listens to the dissonance of an Oriental orchestra or to a primitive orchestra in any country he is disagreeably disturbed. He thinks the dissonance unpleasant. It never occurs to him that the anxiety and trouble it causes are not an acoustical phenomenon, bearing no relation to any judgment of value or to any affective appreciation. If he is disturbed, it is by something within himself. At the bottom of his being a profound animal instinct, long repressed by the weight of social life, is perhaps reawakened. He would not care to admit this, for he has spent all his life denying such instincts.

HINDU music remains strictly faithful to the supreme test, 'Know thyself.' Consciously, by a small number of carefully measured chords that seem strange and barbaric to Western ears, it probes a man and turns him inside out like a glove. Moreover, real harmony, in the narrow Western sense of a succession of agreeable chords, plays almost no part in a Hindu orchestra, for, as I have said, its

power to arouse is equally slight. The living harmony of Indian music is due chiefly to a simultaneous interlacing of complex, definite rhythms that marvelously reflect all the multiplicity of life. It triumphs when this skillful diversity is suddenly resolved in a final dissonance, a single cry of sad consciousness, or in a positive silence that embraces a whole universe. The music of the West has lost this feeling for primitive rhythms. It has forgotten that they can make one think. It subordinates rhythm, which it has simplified and stripped of all its richness and effectiveness, to the principal purpose of the West: distraction, time-killing.

By arranging moments of silence, the theme of the *rag* imposes on man the empty form of immediate consciousness. Consonances and dissonances then fill this form with a content. The organic being of man, with all its contrary, discordant tendencies, is finally aroused and put in the only position in which it can attain freedom, in the lucid consciousness of the instant.

All primitive peoples have been able to set in motion the irresistible power of certain rhythmic alliances, certain dissonances. Often, by some very simple process such as frenzied acceleration, they increase this power to violate and dominate human coenesthesia. Music thus becomes one of their chief instruments of sorcery, magic, or social communication. The music of the Ibos of Nigeria, to take one example among a thousand, 'touches the most intimate chords in man. It moves his primitive instincts. It exercises over the individual an empire so complete that while it lasts the spirit is almost separated from the

body. Even the European, however little disposed to music, feels the elementary forces of his nature strongly moved by the passionate fever of these possessed musicians.' So says G. T. Basden in his book, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, quoted by Lévy-Bruhl in his own work, *The Supernatural and Nature in Primitive Mentality*.

The magic music of the primitive inhabitants of India probably nourished the more civilized art of the Aryans. I can bear witness to the almost hypnotic effect that the Dravidians of Ceylon, who are accustomed to performing in the big European fairs, produce with a few rudimentary percussion instruments. It is probable that when the Aryans penetrated Hindustan they discovered similar musical practices among the Dravidians established there.

The Hindus, who contain an extraordinary racial mixture, unquestionably had a greater mastery than any other people of the magic power of music. They knew how to remove it from the realm of religious ritual and purify it, directing it toward more definite, more disinterested ends than magic or propitiation. Their rapid progress and, presently, their skill in manufacturing instruments enabled them to fulfill this purpose. Some of their instruments are of an extremely archaic type, such as the *sarode*, which has a great number of supplementary strings that simply provide resonance. But thanks to the richness of resonance possible, and to the suppleness of the instrument in the hands of the interpreter of the *rag*, this piece of wood and strings vibrates and responds to every note that it gives forth, just as the human organism of the listener responds in silence.

The result is a power of physiological penetration that is all the more astonishing since it has no connection with the intensity of the sound. On the contrary, the Hindu musician is marvelously skillful at playing almost noiselessly. He plucks a string, and living echoes arise both in the instrument and in the body of the listener. The agile play of his fingers modulates the body of resonance with precise palpitations. The musician lets the sound die, constantly sculpturing it to its death, to silence. And one feels that he continues to sculpture the silence. At this moment the music becomes almost visible about the musician. His fingers seem to be handling luminous, silent veins. He who knows how to listen is revealed to himself at this supreme moment of perfect silence by the musical miracle. The melody, which imposes the form, and the harmony, which evokes the living substance, are joined together in their common end—the silent moment of self-perception.

THE perfection of such an art is connected with that exceptional historical phenomenon, the source of a whole civilization, which might be called the 'Hindu miracle,' just as the impulse that gave rise to our own civilization is referred to as the 'Greek miracle.' Unlike the nations of Europe, India, which has indulged in reflective thought to such an extent that it has had syllogistic logic and scholasticism ever since its earliest days, has not forgotten the primitive base on which every civilization is founded. In spite of the Brahmans and their efforts to protect the white race by the caste system, a fruitful interpenetration has

occurred. Ever since the first centuries of Aryan migration to India, there has been intermarriage between the newcomers and the Dravidians. This co-existence of two opposite types of mentality is evident in Hindu writings. In the framework of some perfectly coherent, logical doctrine in the Upanishads we see the unextinguished force of primitive magic participation. In the same way, the emotional power of primitive music has been preserved in Hindu music but has been subjected to the highest functions that can be given to any human art or institution, that of awakening the consciousness, of stimulating people to think of themselves as they are.

It would be artificial to think of Hindu music and dancing separately. When the Hindu dancer performs it is as if he were the chief musician in the orchestra. The *rags* are replaced by *mudras*, or traditional gestures, each of which has as precise a meaning as a word and a power of evocation that can often touch a Westerner who does not know its exact meaning, a man like myself, for instance. The musicians accompany the dancer with their eyes concentrated on him. They envelop him closely in their rhythms as if to uphold his silent movements. They underline his dance, creating at every instant the atmosphere in which the gesture takes its full value. The dancer and the musician are both subject to a kind of rigorous mathematical law. They are both doing exactly the same thing, and you keep thinking you are going to see the wires that attach them to each other. The dance reaches the culmination of its significant power at certain moments of immobility, sudden gulfs of consciousness that are bridged by the

arrested gesture of the dancer and by the sudden, complete silence of the orchestra.

These *rags* and *mudras*, which are subject to rigid, secular laws, yet are freely interpreted by musicians and dancers, have given extraordinary scope to Hindu pantomime. For there is seldom any distinction between the actor and the dancer. The pantomimist can relate in dance any of the complicated old legends, all of which are familiar to the Hindu audience. There are no spoken lines in the old dance drama. The actors engage in lively pantomimic dialogues, and the orchestra envelops their performance with an atmosphere of sound that gives it its full meaning. Often the orchestra becomes a choir, and human voices glorify the heroes. In spite of all the orthodox Brahmans and all the religious sects, the people still bring

together on the stage, for their greater satisfaction, the gods, heroes, genii, and demons of all the Indian cults. The numberless legends about Siva, Rama, and Krishna, with all the embroidery that has been added to them, all these traditional subjects of folklore, sustained by the direct, irresistible power of music, are able to touch the people, even to the lowest peasant. At the same time, the literal meaning of the legend and the emotional meaning of the musical accompaniment are reinforced by a spiritual drama that is not symbolic but is directly stimulated in the consciousness of each individual by what I roughly call successive moments of silence and immobility. Ability to experience this ultimate significance has nothing to do with intellectual culture. It depends only on the individual's degree of consciousness.

II. PILGRIMAGE TO GAUTAMA BUDDHA

By AYI TENDULKAR

Translated from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Zürich German-Language Daily

'PERCEIVING with the heart the heart of the world.' These words vibrated within me as I caught my last glimpse of the Vishnupada Temple disappearing behind me, losing itself in the purple shadows cast by the early morning sun. I was making my way to Buddh Gaya, the holiest spot of Buddhism. I was venturing to the Bo tree, to the stone seat of the great Buddha. The narrow road, shaded by parallel rows of trees, extended straight ahead of me and impelled me onward. Rice fields lay on either side, less than six feet below the road's surface. They stretched far

into the distance, constantly broken by gentle hills. Insects were humming, the rice fields lay bare in the morning sun, the barren hills became more jagged. The wheels of my tonga labored uphill. 'From here you get your last glimpse of the Vishnupada Temple. Latsahib [the Viceroy] himself came here to see it,' said the narrow-waisted Indian who was driving the tonga, and his black eyes danced.

To his tremendous astonishment, I paid him the money for the whole tonga journey, threw him a package of cigarettes that I had bought at the station, made him a present of the