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MUSIC
AND
MUSICAL THOUGHT
IN
EARLY INDIA

Lewis Rowell

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quote from previous authorities and to attribute unidentified material to eminent authors; consequently the final form of a treatise as it has come down to us is sometimes more like a selection from an expandable data file than a unified dissertation—or to borrow an analogy from J. A. B. van Buitenen, more like a small library than a book.³⁵

Many authors and works are now known only by name or on the evidence of citations in other treatises. The second half of the first millennium A.D. is a particularly dark age in Indian musicological literature, and names such as Kohala, Kaśyapa, Nārada, Śārdūla, and Yāṣṭika remain no more than shadowy figures. These preliminary cautions will be amplified in chapter 6, and the present remarks are intended merely as a reminder that certain reservations are necessary in interpreting a manuscript tradition in which no documents exist in “original” form—whatever that may have been—and in which even the concept of an original form may be misleading. What is important in the end is the text as it survives, whatever its imperfections, and the level of musical development therein recorded. Philological investigations should and will continue, but in the case of most of the above texts the point of diminishing returns has long since passed.

I should also point out that references to the music of early India are by no means confined to formal treatises, and that much useful information is to be found in a wide range of literature: the great epics, plays, poems, and the many genres of technical literature. Much of this material is peripheral to the central concerns of musical authors, but it helps to fill in the picture. And finally, one must acknowledge the depth of the tradition set down in this corpus of music literature. While a particular text may have reached a point after which no further substantive additions were made, it is likely that much of its material may have been drawn verbatim from much earlier texts which no longer exist—or which perhaps never did exist in written form. For these reasons a corpus of musical thought spanning roughly a thousand years between A.D. 250 and 1250 has preserved in fossilized form large quantities of material that may reasonably be attributed to authors as early as the fifth century B.C. and which may, like many other important documents of ancient Indian civilization, have first been formulated in an oral tradition and have been transmitted from teacher to student in the same way before finally becoming fixed in the form of a written text.

T W O THOUGHT

Know thou the soul (*ātman*) as riding in a chariot,
The body as the chariot.
Know thou the intellect (*buddhi*) as the chariot-driver,
And the mind (*manas*) as the reins.

The senses (*indriya*), they say, are the horses;
The objects of sense, what they range over.
The self combined with senses and mind
Wise men call “the enjoyer.”

Kaṭha Upaniṣad 3.3–4¹

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Many of the characteristic features of traditional Indian thinking are evident in this passage from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, one of the great works of metaphysical speculation intended to amplify the teachings of the Vedas and assemble them into a unified, systematic philosophy. Among these features are the highly introspective focus, the detailed analysis of the self, the multiple categories, and the colorful analogy that reaches back into the historical memory of the Indo-Aryan invaders as they swept down onto the plains of northern India with their horse chariots. Also, and importantly, the theme of mental discipline and control of the organs of sense as the means by which a final goal is attained.

To say something meaningful about thought is an ambitious undertaking and should restrain our expectations. By “thought” I mean the entire complex of mental activity, ingrained habits of thinking, instinctive reactions, traditional topics, cultural strategies of explanation, assumptions, values, preferences, connections, linguistic possibilities, and of course the inevitable blind spots and mental quirks that impede our understanding. We shall consider informal as well as formal thinking. Indian scholars, despite their formidable reasoning skills, recognized the limitations of linguistic technique and the dangers of overabstraction and attempted to make their arguments as concrete and colorful as possible. I shall try to follow their example, but a certain amount of abstraction will be unavoidable.

In this chapter I shall indicate the main lines of thought within which mu-

sical speculation arose, lines that were rooted in the Vedic tradition, were developed and amplified in the ancillary literature, and were eventually brought into firmer organization during the period of the orthodox philosophical systems—the period during which many of the later musical treatises cited were produced. All of this will provide the intellectual background for the analyses of the musical *śāstras* in chapter 6. Here I shall point out a number of important continuities of Indian thought and proceed from there with some analysis of the systematic and symbolic dimensions of the philosophical tradition. Having thus established the necessary intellectual foundations, we will be ready to take up in turn each of the main issues in Indian musical speculation.

2.2 CONTINUITIES OF INDIAN THOUGHT

Truth has always existed. It was first revealed to the ancient sages through their sense of hearing, and it is thus known as *śruti*, “that which has been heard.”² It must be kept alive by memory (the Sanskrit word for “tradition” is *smṛti*, “that which has been remembered”) and amplified by the methods of scholastic inquiry. And finally it is to be uttered, because only then can its full power become manifest. The search is open-ended, since truth can never be known in full. To employ a typical analogy, truth exists in the form of a seed or a kernel—a nuclear idea of enormous potential but in need of analysis and elaboration before its full range of meaning can begin to become apparent. In the effort to understand why Indian musical thought is the way it is, it will be necessary to keep this image constantly before us.

The object of inquiry is that which already exists, in the form of aphorisms, pithy sayings, vivid expressions and images, and terse definitions. Essential information is prepackaged into individual modules corresponding roughly to the length of the mental present, formulated in the laconic sutra (thread) style of literary expression or in metrical couplets (*ślokas*) of standard length and structure, and written upon individual palm leaves trimmed to uniform size. The method of inquiry is to recite, recopy, and ponder this testimony and the accumulation of analysis and interpretation with which it is eventually surrounded, perhaps adding some new insight or point of interpretation. Little wonder that the commentary became the basic form of literary analysis in early Indian civilization.

Indian thought is relentlessly taxonomic. A profusion of categories unfold, each giving way to new subcategories and each lending itself to analysis from multiple perspectives. It is difficult for a Westerner to accept this concept of open-ended inquiry, of a method whose goal—like the goal of

Zeno's racecourse—is unattainable. Every statement turns out to be false in that it is inescapably an oversimplification that blurs finer distinctions. And because Indian thought tends to be inclusive rather than exclusive, contradictions abound, and the resulting categories are never as neatly organized or as mutually exclusive as we would like them to be. Faced with these contradictions and ambiguities, the commentator had his work cut out for him. It has often been pointed out that formal systems of Indian logic have never accepted the law of the excluded middle (which holds that in the case of an apparent contradiction, a proposition either is or is not true), and hence Indian taxonomies seldom are arrayed in sharp dichotomies and exclusive categories.

Indian thought relies upon authority. As Richard Lannoy put it, “oldest is best!”³ and in most systems of Indian philosophy the testimony of reliable persons and scriptures has been regarded as a source of valid knowledge and therefore among the major *pramānas* (standards) on which correct inference can be based.⁴ The important *pramāna* identified as *śabda* (sound) *pramāna* refers specifically to uttered testimony. The message here is that truth is to be proclaimed, and its utterance carries vital power; hence the emphasis upon the efficacy of mantras (formulas), the importance of memory, and the divine power of Vāc, the speech principle as deified in the *Rgveda*.⁵

Mediation has always been seen as an obstacle to full understanding. It is paradoxical that Indian thought has had as its goal the search for ultimate meaning and truth unmediated by language and logical thinking, under the influence of the traditional concept of essential reality masked by the phenomenal illusion known as *maya*. The search has led thinkers in the direction of metaphysics and nonmaterialist ontologies. But the paradox lies in this: despite the inherently inadequate tools of language and logical thinking, authors have resorted to the most rigorous analysis of their language, alongside their attempts to capture elusive meaning in the form of the many atmospheric, vegetative, and animal analogies that are such a colorful feature of the literature of music and the other compartments of the technical literature.

Indian thought is dynamic, not static, and emphasizes processes and transformations rather than permanent certainties. It identifies with the processive world of Heraclitus and Empedocles in preference to the static worldview of Parmenides: becoming is valued above being. This attitude reveals the influence of the traditional Hindu worldview of a continuous process of creation and dissolution under the successive patronage of Brahmā,

Viṣṇu, and Śiva. It is a worldview, as Heimann points out, that encourages a biological and long-term view of life, history, and time—in which nothing is isolated from its antecedents and its consequences (according to the doctrine of karma), the present is to be held in proper perspective and viewed with some objective detachment, the potential is to be valued above the actual, and a continuous, interpenetrating life force provides subtle connections among all creatures and things.⁶ It is not surprising that nineteenth-century German thinkers, and especially Goethe and Schopenhauer, were attracted to Indian philosophy, nor is it surprising that the pervading values of nineteenth-century romanticism were so close to the values that have informed Indian music and thought for millennia. Despite the differences in musical language and style, this was the era in which the intellectual orbits of East and West made their closest approach. But despite their common assumptions, each remained unable to comprehend the phenomenal basis of the other's music.

Indian thought is also, as Lannoy has indicated, "hylozoistic," which he defines as a "tendency to draw no clear distinction between matter, life, and mind."⁷ The major schools of systematic philosophy differed on the question of whether reality was monistic or pluralistic, but running throughout their counterarguments is a clear sense of the interconnectedness of all things. Accordingly, authors sought constantly to identify universals and set them above the limitations of the individual and the particular. The influence of this line of thinking is evident in the traditional concepts of form and substance: form is merely a temporary condition of flexible substance.

Whether substance is, as some have argued, nothing more than a persuasive illusion, or as others have claimed, actual matter that is subject to series of transformations, few Indian thinkers would deny the underlying unity of the animate and inanimate worlds and the mind—the instrument by which all things are known. If substance always exists in mutable form, as an essential core that persists during all its manifestations to the senses, then we can more readily understand the traditional preferences for a plurality of forms, for the appearance of deities in their various incarnations,⁸ and for some of the most characteristic processes in the arts—processes in which visual and audible constructions of all sorts appear in series of playful transformations and are savored in their successive aspects. That part of reality which can be known is always multidimensional and can be known only after exploration from multiple perspectives, as when we circumambulate a temple or (as the six blind men discovered in a familiar parable) an elephant. The aim of art was not perfection of form but a profusion of forms,

and the object was more to explore possibilities than to achieve closure or demonstrate ideal forms and proportions.

2.3 SYSTEMATIC THINKING

Indian philosophy is known for its elaborate "systems"—schools of thought (about the universe, the self, and the search for true knowledge) that were worked out by generations of thinkers over many centuries. The limited scope of this study must rule out even a sketchy exposition of the main systems, but some discussion is necessary if only to lay out some of the main lines of thought as essential background for the musical doctrines to be investigated. The various schools of formal thought can be divided in a number of ways: philosophies as opposed to religions (neither an easy nor an obvious distinction), speculative as opposed to practical systems, Aryan and non-Aryan, orthodox (schools that accept the authority of the Vedas) as opposed to heterodox schools (those that do not), and numerous finer distinctions.⁹

Although as usual precise dating is not possible, a traditional division into four main phases has been widely accepted. The Vedic period (to about 500 B.C.) is the period of the scriptures—the four Vedas and their auxiliary texts. From 500 B.C. to about A.D. 200 has been designated as the period of the epics (the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, of which the former includes the *Bhagavadgītā*); this same period witnessed the rise of three of the main heterodox schools—Buddhism, Jainism, and the Cārvāka school of materialism, which is known largely by the efforts of subsequent schools to refute its doctrines. From A.D. 200 until 700 was the age of the sutras, the collections of laconic sayings and cryptic verses upon which later scholars built their comprehensive systems. This is also a crucial formative period for systematic musical thought; the earliest of the major musical treatises were written in a similar style, a style that encouraged and rewarded the attention of later commentators. The fourth and final period (A.D. 700 to 1700, or perhaps the present) is the age of the scholiasts, an age in which the teachings of the ancient authors were elaborated and amplified into formal philosophical systems.

I shall not dwell on the important religious traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, since the distinctive features of their teachings were largely irrelevant to musical thought, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the influence of their differences from traditional Hinduism is not apparent in the musicological literature—with the one possible and interesting exception of the Jain author Pārśvadeva, whose thirteenth-century treatise entitled

Saṅgītasamayāsāra (PS) has yet to be studied in the detail it deserves. I shall also defer discussion of the mystical movement known as Tantra (beginning in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.) and the religiophilosophic school of Kashmir Shaivism (after the ninth century A.D.) which came later to have an enormous influence upon musical thought, as reflected in the writings of Abhinavagupta. The remainder of this section, then, will be devoted to some introductory comments on the six orthodox *darśanas* (literally, points of view), their common assumptions, and a few of the more important variations (see table 1).¹⁰

The six systems differ in several aspects, among them (1) emphasis, in that some systems incline more to metaphysics, others to practical conduct; (2) whether they are monistic or pluralistic, a vital distinction in Indian thought; (3) the nature of the theistic outlook and the theory of creation; (4) the purpose of the system; (5) the specific set of categories; and (6) the epistemological method advocated. Although all six are regarded today as "completed" systems, their general doctrines and specific arguments (especially those of Advaita Vedānta) are still very much alive and flourishing in India today.

On the other hand, certain important lines of thought run through all the great systems, although to recognize them is to run the risk of glossing over the many equally important differences in application, interpretation, and

Table 1 The Six Orthodox Systems

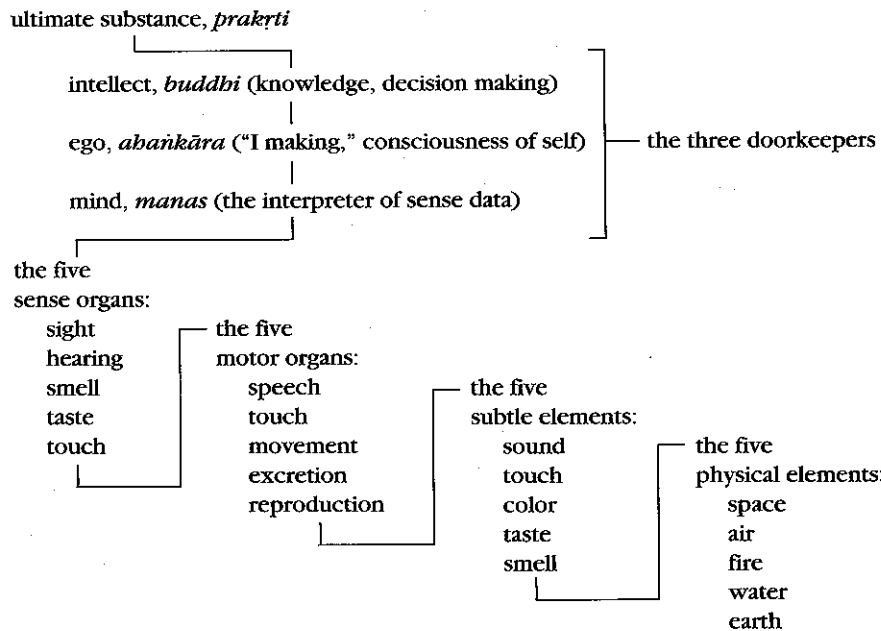
System	Founder	Emphasis
Nyāya: "analysis"	Akṣapāda Gautama	Logical realism
Vaiśeṣika: "the school of individual characteristics"	Ulūka Kaṇāda	Realistic pluralism
Sāṅkhya: "the enumeration"	The sage Kapila	Evolutionary dualism
Yoga: "harnessing [the mind and senses]"	Patañjali	Disciplined meditation
Mīmāṃsā: "investigation"	Jaimini	Interpretation of the Vedic teachings on ritual
Vedānta: "the end of the Vedas"	Bādarāyaṇa	Interpretation of the natural philosophy of the Vedas

¹⁰The author of the *Yōga Sūtras* is almost certainly not the great grammarian and author of the *Mahābhāṣya* (2d century B.C.).

context. First, philosophy is not restricted to the proverbial ivory tower but is accompanied and supported by a practical, sensible way of life, featuring such things as meditation, devotional rituals, self-control, sensory deprivation, breathing exercises, and the like. It is for this reason that the six major systems are paired (as shown in table 1), each pair consisting of a speculative and a practical member. Second, despite individual variations, each of the six systems rests on metaphysical presuppositions (as opposed to the Cārvāka school) and asserts that ultimate reality is situated beyond the illusory world of phenomena, obscured by the "veil" of *māya*. Third, each of the systems has accepted the crucial doctrine of karma, which acknowledges a continuous chain of cause and effect in which our actions are followed by inevitable consequences that determine our state in subsequent reincarnations. This influential doctrine rests on the assumption that the soul is immortal, with *mokṣa* (liberation) or *nirvāna* (extinction) as the goal—annihilation through escape from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Fourth, all share in the highly introspective focus on the analysis of the self or soul (*ātman*): ultimate philosophy is a lens trained inward, and the concept of the self has been subjected to a penetrating analysis without a parallel in world philosophy. It is defined in many stages, phases, layers, or *tattvas*: pure transcendent being, consciousness, ego, intellect, mind—all represented by important technical terms and arranged in complex hierarchies. And fifth, all six systems stress that which is latent—pure potential, dormant energy, an infinite well of subtle life force—whether conceived as the primal waters, the reservoir of vital air situated at the center of the human body, or the continuous vibration of all creation. This is the source of the sage's power and the force that connects all things; it cannot be perceived directly, but its presence may be inferred.

As brief illustrations of the range of these doctrines, especially that of the *ātman*, I present the relevant views of two of the major systems. In the monistic and relatively uncomplicated structure of the Vaiśeṣika system, the basic substances (*dravyas*) are nine in number: earth, water, fire, air, ether (*ākāśa*, the medium for sound), time, space, self, and mind (*manas*). In the more elaborate set of categories of the dualistic Sāṅkhya system, we find a fuller development which takes the form of an evolution of the manifested universe, as the result of an interaction between ultimate substance (*prakṛti*) and one of an infinite number of *puruṣas* (a concept that may be defined as "pure consciousness of the individual self"). The evolution proceeds by means of the cooperative interplay of twenty-four *tattvas*, as arranged on the following diagram:



There are several conclusions to be drawn from this display. The elaborate structure of the Sāṅkhya system and its counterparts in the other orthodox systems have encouraged the development of a profound philosophy of mind and a complex psychology that emphasizes the theory of perception. Within these lines of thinking, epistemology plays a more important role than ontology. The underlying assumptions that (1) matter is permanent and (2) force is persistent imply that nothing can ever “come into being” or “pass away” in the Aristotelian sense. Substance can undergo transformation, but it retains its essential nature. Process is all-important and all-pervasive, and that process, although it may not have a specific ultimate goal, always has a direction along the continuum from subtle to gross matter.

Above these twenty-four *tattvas* the exponents of the later school of Kashmir Shaivism add eleven transpersonal and transcendental categories: beginning with five manifestations of the universal self (as pure being, consciousness or energy, will, knowledge, and action), followed by *māyā* (the first manifestation of the “impure creation” and the power that obscures), then *kalā* (the limited power of action) and its four effects: discrimination, choice, time, and limitation. No mere enumeration of topics can give more than a hint of the lofty abstractions and fierce complexities of these systems,

but the tendency to infer subtle, unmanifested, transcendental principles stands out as one of the hallmarks of systematic Indian thinking and could not have failed to influence the idea of music as it developed. It is also easy to understand how deeply the notion of an independent, immaterial, transpersonal, universal self or will would have appealed to a thinker such as Arthur Schopenhauer. European philosophers of the nineteenth century may not have been acquainted with the full details of the traditional Indian philosophies, but they found something profoundly sympathetic in the attitudes outlined above and the characteristic Indian *weltanschauung*.

Another significant concept of the Sāṅkhya system will provide further insight into Indian ways of thinking: universal substance (*prakṛti*) is further conceived in the form of a rope fashioned from three intertwined strands or *gunas*: *sattva* (often translated as “goodness”), the principle of illumination, intelligence, pleasure, whiteness, and pure light; *rajas* (passion), the principle of activity, stimulation, pain, redness, and fire; and *tamas* (darkness), the principle of inertia, obstruction, heaviness, indifference, darkness, and earth. All reality arises from the continuous interaction of the three principles, with one or another always dominating. In a familiar analogy, the three *gunas* have been likened to the wick, oil, and flame that combine to produce light from a lamp.

The classical exposition of this doctrine appears in the fourteenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, as Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna in the “Discipline of Distinction of the Three Strands”:

Goodness, passion, and darkness,

The Strands that spring from material nature,

Bind, O great-armed one,

In the body the immortal embodied (soul). . . .

Goodness causes attachment to bliss,

Passion to action, son of Bharata,

But darkness, obscuring knowledge,

Causes attachment to heedlessness likewise. . . .

Of action well done, they say

The fruit is spotless and of the nature of goodness;

But the fruit of passion is pain;

The fruit of darkness is ignorance.¹¹

It is important to note that the *gunas* were conceived as essential components of substance, not as qualities or attributes, but in a typical Indian twist, the resulting substance was held to be one, not a composite. The notion that something may be both composite and incomposite at one and the same

time sets the Indian tradition apart from one of the cardinal ontological principles of the ancient West, under which one of the most basic distinctions that can be made is to separate otherwise similar things into those which are composite and those which are not. On the other hand, the Western doctrine of the four humors (with the conventional correspondences to the four temperaments, the four physical elements, and the four properties of nature) is an obvious parallel to the theory of the three *guṇas*, and there are also some broad parallels between early Indian and Western medical practice and pharmacology, in that disease was regarded as an imbalance, and health as a balance, of the bodily elements. And in both traditions what may perhaps have begun as a practical method of diagnosis and therapy has developed into an influential theory of personality. To mention one example, *rajas* was considered to be the dominant characteristic of a king (*rāja*) and his warlike *kṣatriya* class; it has subsequently become the basis for a personality stereotype that runs through Indian history and literature and has also become one of the essential components in the definition of poetic and/or musical style.¹² And as a final observation, the concept that any object or process can best be defined by enumerating its qualities, or *guṇas*, has evolved into one of the standard strategies of musical explanation.

2.4 SYMBOLIC THINKING

We have been examining the conscious, rational level of thinking—a mode of inquiry that was honed to a razor edge of precision by the great Indian philosophers, but within which the inherent limitations of language and logical reasoning would inevitably set obstacles in the seeker's path. Symbolic thinking—in the form of vivid metaphors, similes, and analogies—became a popular means for getting at the essence of things that are either too subtle or too complicated to grasp by ordinary observation or reasoning. This type of thinking, which the Belgian musicologist Jan L. Broeckx has labeled “analogical thinking” (as opposed to his three other categories—the generative, actualized, and syntactical modes of musical thinking),¹³ has become one of the most powerful tools of Indian musical speculation.

Authors took their analogies from the familiar creatures, objects, and surroundings of the everyday world: a clay pot, as a universal symbol for any type of container; digging a well, as an illustration of the way in which a student should obtain knowledge from a teacher; the string running through a necklace of gemstones, as a symbol of the rhythmic continuity by which a musical performance should be integrated; a tigress carrying her cubs in her teeth, as an analogy for the precise, delicate enunciation of a sacred text; insects building an anthill, as a symbol of industry and patience; the spices

used in cooking, as an analogy for the way in which the various actions and emotions during the course of a play fuse into one dominant emotional tone; a woman's jewelry, as a symbol for ornamentation in music; and the relative viscosity of fluids such as water, milk, oil, and honey, as symbols of melodic continuity—all delivered in a tone that was both moralistic and affectionate, and often seasoned with no small amount of humor.

Specific examples of these and other analogies will appear frequently in subsequent chapters, and the present discussion is intended primarily as an introduction to this characteristic mode of thinking. I wish, however, to highlight one particular metaphor with important implications for music—the description of musical sound as an emanation along an outward spiral pathway. The metaphor works in both directions: the way of action (the *kar-mamārga*) radiates outward from the center, whereas the way of perception and of knowledge (the *jñānamārga*) proceeds in the opposite direction.

The metaphor of outward passage is a standard topic of Indian culture, as expressed in explanations for the emission of breath or musical sound from the central cavities of the human body, or the pattern of natural growth that can be observed in the leaves of a lotus, or the concentric ripples produced by a stone dropped into a pool of water. Emanation is a continuous process, gradually losing some of its force and concentration as the vital breath or life force proceeds along its spiral or radiating course and emerges in gross, manifested form—as articulate speech sounds, meaningful words, or musical sounds and rhythms.

The metaphor is supported by a wealth of cultural imagery, particularly in the Tantric philosophy of *kundalini yoga*, in which the bodily channels are visualized in the form of a coiled serpent extending upward and passing through various bodily regions, the *cakras*.¹⁴ An earlier and more abstract version of the same pathway is the Upanishadic conception of the body in terms of five superimposed layers,¹⁵ interpreted in the Advaita Vedantic teachings of Śaṅkara as five “sheaths” that surround the pure self: from inner to outer, these are (1) the sheath of “bliss,” likened to the plane of deep sleep; (2) the sheath of understanding; (3) the sheath of mind; (4) the sheath of vital breath; and (5) the gross physical body, the sheath of “food.”¹⁶ And, in a related analogy, the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* refers to the human body as the divine vina and outlines a set of point-by-point correspondences between the sound-producing features of the vina and the body.¹⁷ This line of anthropomorphic imagery is also reversible, allowing one to endow a musical instrument with human properties or to view the human body as a cosmic instrument.

Other implications of the metaphor of outward passage include a progres-

sion from the lower to the higher, from subtle to gross (matter), from continuous to discontinuous, and from the nonmanifest to the manifest: lower in this context refers to the so-called knot of Brahmā (the *brahmagranthi*), conceived as the life source of the human body and situated near the root of the navel;¹⁸ and upper, in the sense that human thought, breath, speech, and song are conceived as upward processes. The consequences of this line of imagery for the traditional system of values are as follows:

<i>Greater value</i>	<i>Lesser value</i>
inner	outer
lower	higher
subtle	gross
continuous	discontinuous
nonmanifest	manifest

In contrast, the inward pathway—the way of perception and of knowledge, affect as opposed to effect—signifies a process of increasing focus, distillation, and concentration of energies, leading to greater purity, understanding, and eventual detachment from the phenomenal world. According to the teachings of Yoga, by means of fixation and intense concentration on the object of perception, followed by a stage-by-stage withdrawal of perception from the phenomenal illusion toward which those perceptions were directed, the yogin may be able to achieve *samādhi* (absorption)—the trancelike state in which the distinction between subject and object disappears.

The special relevance of this line of thinking for the theory of musical sound will become apparent in chapter 3.

T H R E E

SOUND

The Word is measured in four quarters. The wise who possess insight know these four divisions. Three quarters, concealed in secret, cause no movement. The fourth is the quarter that is spoken by Men.

Rgveda 1.164.45¹

Sound is not what one should desire to understand. One should know the hearer.

Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 3.8²

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Sound is everywhere, within and around us—a continuum of vital force and latent energy. Only a part of it can be heard: the world of manifest, audible sounds with their individual phonetic, morphological, and semantic distinctions occupies no more than a small fraction of the total field of sound; the greater part is within, unmanifest and beyond the grasp of conscious experience. The sounds that are uttered, according to the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*, are subject to all the illusions of the phenomenal world; what these sounds mean, or suggest, is all-important. Consequently the source and the goal of sound are of greater intrinsic interest than the phenomenon itself.

This chapter is concerned with both audible and inaudible sound. I shall draw upon the Upanishadic literature to establish the traditional cultural background for the idea of sound before proceeding to some of the refinements and hairsplittings of the later philosophical systems. My contention, here and elsewhere in this study, is that musical thought has been molded more by the gradual diffusion of deeper layers of cultural ideas in relatively unsophisticated form than by the systematic arguments of professional philosophers.

3.2 THE DIVISIONS OF SOUND

The four divisions mentioned in the passage from the *Rgveda*, three inaudible and one audible, form the basis for much of the later speculation about the metaphysical nature of sound, and especially for the influential concept of *śabdabrahman* as formulated by the grammarian Bhartṛhari (ca.