



Editorial

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Songs, Society, and the Common Man: The Eternal Music of Human Values

Civilizations are often remembered through their philosophies, scriptures, epics, and intellectual traditions. Great philosophers have shaped the course of human thought through profound reflections on morality, ethics, spirituality, politics, and existence. Yet, despite the monumental significance of philosophical discourse, the common man across ages has rarely lived by philosophy books alone. The ordinary individual seldom reads Aristotle, Confucius, Shankaracharya, Nietzsche, or Sartre. What truly enters the bloodstream of society is not always philosophy in its abstract form, but philosophy transformed into songs, stories, and

cultural expressions. Among these, songs have remained the most powerful medium through which societies nurture ethics, emotions, social values, collective memory, and cultural continuity.

Songs belong to the people. They travel beyond literacy, class, geography, and time. A philosopher may influence intellectual circles, but a song reaches the farmer in the field, the labourer at work, the mother singing to her child, the traveler on a lonely road, and the youth seeking identity. Songs become the living carriers of moral imagination. They are remembered not because people consciously study them, but because they become inseparable from life itself.

From ancient tribal chants to modern cinematic music, songs have shaped the emotional and ethical consciousness of societies. Long before the emergence of printed books, oral traditions preserved human wisdom through songs and hymns. In India, the Vedic hymns were sung rather than merely recited. The Bhakti and Sufi movements spread spiritual egalitarianism through devotional songs that touched the hearts of ordinary people far more deeply than scholarly theological debates. Kabir's dohas, Meera's bhajans, and Bulleh Shah's verses survived through singing voices among common people who may never have entered academic institutions but internalized profound spiritual and moral truths through music.

Similarly, in other cultures, songs served as collective repositories of wisdom. African folk songs carried histories of suffering, resilience, and communal solidarity. European ballads narrated heroism, tragedy, and moral conflicts. American spirituals emerged from the pain of slavery and became songs of hope, resistance, and dignity. Every civilization possesses musical traditions through which human experiences are transmitted from one generation to another.

What distinguishes songs from philosophical texts is their emotional immediacy. Philosophy demands contemplation and

intellectual discipline. Songs demand participation. A person may forget a philosophical proposition, but may remember a song for decades. Music enters human consciousness through repetition and emotion. It shapes attitudes subtly, often unconsciously. A society singing songs of compassion, sacrifice, courage, patriotism, or devotion gradually internalizes those values as part of collective behavior.

This phenomenon becomes particularly visible in cinema and popular culture. In modern times, film songs have become cultural scriptures for millions. The common man frequently imitates not philosophers but singers, actors, and lyrical narratives. Young people model their speech, fashion, emotions, and relationships on songs that dominate public imagination. Songs create role-playing patterns. They provide emotional vocabulary to societies. Love, heartbreak, patriotism, rebellion, spirituality, friendship, and even social protest are often experienced through songs before they are understood intellectually.

In India especially, songs have historically played an extraordinary social role. Patriotic songs inspired freedom movements. Devotional songs united communities beyond caste barriers. Folk songs accompanied agricultural life, marriages, childbirth, festivals, and mourning rituals. Lullabies carried cultural memory from mothers to children. Even today, people may not read philosophical discussions on nationalism, but they emotionally experience national identity through songs sung during public events and celebrations.

The ethical influence of songs also extends into everyday conduct. Songs teach empathy, familial respect, social responsibility, and emotional resilience. In many traditional societies, moral instruction was embedded within musical storytelling. Children learned virtues not through formal lectures but through songs repeated in homes and communities. Music became a pedagogical instrument long

before modern educational theories recognized experiential learning.

However, the immense influence of songs also raises important concerns. Since songs shape public imagination so powerfully, they can either elevate or degrade social values. Music has the capacity to humanize society, but it can also normalize violence, materialism, misogyny, superficiality, or emotional emptiness when driven solely by commercial motives. The cultural responsibility of lyricists, musicians, and media creators therefore becomes significant. If songs can cultivate ethical consciousness, they can equally contribute to moral erosion when artistic expression loses social sensitivity.

Contemporary society often witnesses a paradoxical situation. Technological progress has made music universally accessible, yet meaningful lyrical traditions appear increasingly endangered by market-driven entertainment culture. Many modern songs prioritize instant appeal over lasting emotional or philosophical depth. Nevertheless, even within popular culture, there remains a persistent human hunger for meaningful music. Songs with emotional sincerity and ethical resonance continue to survive across generations because they address fundamental human needs that transcend temporary trends.

The relationship between songs and society also reveals an important truth about human nature. Human beings are not merely rational creatures; they are emotional and imaginative beings. Ideas become socially transformative only when they are emotionally embodied. Songs perform precisely this function. They convert abstract values into shared emotional experiences. A philosophical argument against injustice may persuade the intellect, but a song against injustice can mobilize masses.

Religious traditions across the world understood this principle long ago. Hymns, chants, qawwalis, gospel music, and

devotional songs were never secondary cultural ornaments; they were central to spiritual experience itself. Singing collectively creates emotional solidarity. It dissolves social isolation and generates a sense of shared humanity. In moments of grief, celebration, revolution, or devotion, people instinctively turn toward songs because music articulates emotions beyond the reach of ordinary language.

In literary and cultural studies, songs therefore deserve greater recognition not merely as entertainment but as social texts. They reveal the aspirations, anxieties, ethics, and emotional structures of societies. Through songs, historians can understand public sentiment; through songs, sociologists can examine collective psychology; through songs, literary scholars can trace cultural evolution. Songs are archives of civilization carried not in libraries alone but in living voices.

Ultimately, the history of humanity cannot be understood only through philosophical treatises or political documents. It must also be understood through the songs people sang while working, praying, celebrating, protesting, loving, and suffering. The common man may never quote philosophers, but he remembers songs. He imitates songs, lives through songs, and often understands life through songs. Music becomes the philosophy of everyday existence.

Thus, songs remain among the most enduring cultural forces in human civilization. Across ages, they have nurtured morality, preserved traditions, strengthened communities, and shaped emotional consciousness. Philosophers may define ideals, but songs carry those ideals into the hearts of ordinary people. In this sense, music is not merely an artistic expression; it is the living pulse of civilization itself.

— Khurshid Alam, Founder-Editor, Contemporary Literary Review India.

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