

John Edappilly, CMI
DVK, Bangalore

DIVINE AND DEVOTION IN THE MUSIC OF EAST AND WEST

Singing has become an essential part of community worship in any religion. Religious rituals have invariably developed musical styles involving devotional expressions. A brief survey of the world of devotional worship shows that music has always become part and parcel of a religious worship irrespective of its particular creed.

1. Universal Phenomenon of Devotional Music

Devotional songs form the quintessential element in traditional congregational worship in Hinduism. Religious rituals consist entirely of songs in which both tonal and rhythmic musical instrument plays an important accompanying role. The bhakati (devotional) ritual music of four distinct types (1) ślōka (verse) (2) Namavali (sung mantra) (3) Kirthan (refrain type) and (4) Puṇḍarikam (formula) are the most important forms of religious expressions in India today, where every level of traditional Hindu Society is involved extensively in ritual participation.¹ Bhajana is another most important devotional music style within the context of general musical traditions and aesthetics.

In Jewish worship from the earliest of time music and prayer were seen in complementary fashion. We do find a veritable orchestra in the temple, a sacrificial cult inseparable from the Levitical choir and antiphonal psalmody in both temple and nascent synagogue. Rabbinic pronouncements link liturgy to musical performances.²

The Muslims of Arabia do perform the call to prayer through music five times a day. As the muezzin chants from the tower of the mosque,

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1. Simon Robert Leopold : *Spiritual aspects of Indian Music* (Sundeep Prakashan), Delhi, 1984, pp. 1-3.
 2. Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Musical Traditions and Tensions in the American Synagogue" *Concillium*, 202, special column *Music and the Experience of God*, 1989, p. 30.

his electronically amplified voice can be heard for long distances and the calls from neighbouring mosques compete for attention from the faithful. The groups of assembled muslims, whether in mosques or on the median strip of a busy shopping street chant prayers in alternation with a leader.³

In the Christian church, music is a constitutive part of the liturgy and includes Gregorian plainchant, polyphonic singing, modern church music, popular hymns and the use of the organ in Public Worship. Music is used to embellish the liturgical services by arousing the feelings of devotion in the hearer and by helping to foster the participation of the congregation in public worship.⁴

There are different kinds of religions and various styles of worship prevalent among the people of the world. We find religion which believes in personal God, others believing impersonal absolute, and even the kind which deny a personal or impersonal absolute as The Other. Some religions have sacrificial rites, others act without sacrifice, still others fight against all kinds of sacrifices. The code of action and creed of doctrines, some may have, others may not. There are scriptural and non-scriptural religions, organised and unorganised, dogmatic and pragmatic. But it is really so hard to find a religion which never makes use of music in same form or other in their religious devotions. This universal phenomenon of music puts us on the wheel to explore what is the inner intrinsic connection between the devotions and music. How the ritual music become so powerful, meaningful, meditative and transformative as a path for human and divine meeting.

Various claims are made about the influence of music, power of instruments, styles of singing and their suitability for engaging believers in ultimate mystery. The interesting issue I would like to address in this paper is how is the divine presence mediated in this world through a transformative experience created by music.

As Sourindro Mohan Tagore has said: Any amount of words, any length of explanations, any style of illustrations and writings would

3. Ruth M. Stone : "Sound and Rhythm in Corporate ritual in Arabia", *Concillium* 202 Special column *Music and the Experience of God*, 1989, p. 73.

4. Abe Robertson : *Music of the Catholic Church* (Faith and Fact Burns and Oates), London, 1961.

fail to really convey the various degrees of sharpness, depth, gravity and acuteness of emotion created by the sounds of music. The more you try to elucidate it, the more it would elude from yourself.⁵ Through the instrumentality of the media of communication the world of music today has become a fusion place of east and west, of folk and jazz, of classic and pop, leading to unexpected styles and expressions. The modern technology has brought into light the hitherto hidden reality of electronic music, changing the whole concept of original composing and creative expressions in music.

Music is often called the universal language because its meaning and appeal are largely the same for people everywhere. The instinctual vocal and physical reaction to a given situation appears to be same or similar for every people. When a man happens to trample on stone, step into fire, or be pricked by a pin, immediately a reaction is produced together with a sound. In an intense state of surprise, sorrow, satisfaction, anger, horror, fear, joy, love, devotion, ecstasy, etc, people do produce certain sounds peculiar to the emotion but universal for similar occasions. The universal character is seen because the expression is less sophisticatedly articulated and less conventionally co-ordinated. Since music in its original form belongs to the same level, it can express the widest range of inner human emotions like joy and grief, love and hate, peace and turbulence, amusement and reverence, in more universal a style.

2. Music and Emotion

Any philologist would agree that music is anterior to language. Human beings by birth produce inarticulate sounds. From the very early age the human babies produce different sounds to express different feelings and emotions. When hungry or painful, excited or joyful, confident or fearful, the child becomes capable of expressing it in sounds with a different pitch, timbre, intensity and duration. The lengthened tones of pleasure and pain, of joy and affection, must long have preceded every other language and music. As the child grew up to distinguish and differentiate the various emotions and articulate it precisely, its production of sounds also became articulated and distinct. The voice of passion shaped itself in some articulated fashion, and must have been more or less the same in all human creatures. It perhaps differed only in gravity or acuteness

5. Sourindro Mohan Tagore : *Hindu Music* (The Chawkamba Sanskrit series office), Varanasi, 1965. p. 9

according to age, sex and organization, till the invention of words and language by particular convention, in different societies. The primitive and instinctive language or cry of nature, is still retained by animals and universally understood; while our artificial tongues are known only to the small part of the world, where they are learned and spoken. As the expression becomes much more advanced in language, its use turns out to be much less universal.

The elements that go into the formation of different emotions and intensity in the musical voice are many. They are the different qualities of sound. It is through the regular vibrations of the air that musical tones are produced. The accent or inflection expressive of a mood or emotion is effected through the tone of the voice. The height or depth of a tone as related to the other tones in a scale could create a different effect, which is usually called as pitch. The faster the rate of the vibration the higher will be the tone or pitch. The difference in the relative vibration frequency of the voice contributes to the total meaning of the sound or speech. Timbre is the distinctive quality of a musical sound. No two musical instruments have the same timbre. This quality is given to the sound by its overtones which can create parallel overtones of different emotions. Another element that goes into the voice to change the vigor and power is the intensity which refers to loudness or volume of the sound, the fullness of tone. The intensity of a tone is determined by the amplitude of the vibrations that are produced. The different duration or length of a sound also can create a combination to tune you to a particular emotion. All these are the various qualities of musical sound capable of creating; and expressing different intensity, vibration, depth and variety of emotions and ideas in the mind.

3. The Role of Emotion in Devotional Music

Devotion is always personal. It is a personal option and attachment of an individual to a God personally revealing to him or her. Though it is an intellectual option in genuine devotion, it is emotion that gives wings to devotion and devotional expressions. The best prayers and hymns have been originated at a blessed moment of fusion of intellectual and sensible vision, reason and emotion. Skillful deployment of the different constitutive elements of voice has made the music so exciting and expressive of emotions. One of the external elements that has knit into the music with the voice is rhythm. Rhythm creates the feeling of movement in music,

with a kind of universal appeal. Practically every people tap their foot, drum their fingers, or sway their heads in response to strong rhythmic music. Different kinds and varying tempo of rhythm contributes to the intensity and involvement variations in the music. It can create excitement or exhilaration, sluggishness or heaviness. The tempo of the rhythmic beats of music would naturally stir up the tempo of the emotions in mind.

Variety of modes could be created through melody which is made up of single tones of differing pitch, rhythmically strung together in a horizontal line. While melody, a succession of tones, is the horizontal aspect of music, harmony is the vertical aspect. It is a column of sound; that supports melody. A chord consisting of three or more tones placed one above the other on the staff and heard at the same time creates a harmony.

Chords add colour to and create moods in music. Chords with tones that sound pleasing together are consonances, giving a feeling of rest and relaxation, peace and joy. Chords with tones that are harsh and clashing are dissonances. They arouse a feeling of movement and tension. Dissonant chords giving a feeling of restlessness seek completion. They seem to have an urge to become consonances. This urge makes music highly interesting.

The texture of a music is very important in creating and conveying a particular emotion or mood.⁶ It is the skill of the composer in combining and blending the elements of rhythm, melody and harmony that creates the texture. Three kinds of textures have been developed in music: namely, monophonic, polyphonic and homophonic. The two principles of musical form are repetition and contrast. Repetition gives unity to a composition, contrast adds variety.

The development of the style, text and texture of religious music always depends on the true mode of fundamental religious experience each religion imparts. Thus contemplative India with its accent on inwardness and individuality has developed a musical rhythm and style in the great personal expression and dexterity of melody; whereas the Christian community in the West with their idea of the solidarity of

6. Kanti Chandra Pandey, *Comparative Aesthetics*, Vol. I (The Chowkamba Sanskrit series office) Varanasi, 1959, p. 512.

humanity in Christ has given birth to some of the world's best kind of choral singing.

4. Development of Devotional Music in the World

The development of devotional music among different people and civilizations is so fascinating. The Indians always held the idea that music is of divine origin. A number of legends are said in support of this. The origin of Indian music is said to be in the Vedas. Even in the pre-vedic period the natives were using music as folk songs. Music was so important to the people of Mesopotamia in their religious worship. Archaeological findings have unearthed a cuneiform tablet from about 1800 B.C containing a song written in equivalent of a major scale. It is the oldest known example of musical notation. In ancient Egypt flutes and many kinds of harps and lyres were among the instruments used. Egyptian music was probably quiet and restrained. The numerous biblical references to musical instruments and songs indicate that the early Hebrews had a highly developed devotional musical culture. Music was an essential part of life in ancient Greece. Choral music and dance were important in Greek drama. The followers of Apollo used the "Kithara", a string instrument similar to the lyre. A second cult, the Dionysian adopted the "aulos", a wind instrument with a shrill penetrating tone.⁷

The inspiration of the Early European music and its present day styles are from the Greek music.⁸ The first formal music in the West was that of Christian church. It was based partly on the psalms and chants of Hebrew music and partly on the music of Greek. Plain song or plain chant was more in use in the early centuries. In the fourth century St. Ambrose introduced hymns and antiphonal singing into the church service. In the 6th century the Gregorian chant formed the musical setting of the liturgy of Latin rite in the Catholic Church. By 900 A.D. the Gregorian chant reached a high point of its development, and new form of polyphonic singing, voices sung in parallel motion, got started. The music took more complicated conventions to itself. Cantus firmus, discant singing, Ars antiqua and Ars nova were developed eventually. By the time new forms

7. "Music", New Standard Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, Chicago, M. 629.

8. The Greeks have left an exclusive grammar of music, and extensive treatises of the fundamentals of acoustics, aesthetics and music history - Gowri Kuppaswami; *Understanding Western Music* (Sterling Publishers) New Delhi, 1972, p. 121.

of secular music got introduced. A large body of folk and popular music grew up beside the liturgical music of the church. Little is known about secular music before the 10th century.

By the end of 15th century Western music developed into more and more sophisticated forms. The Flemish school of composers established polyphonic techniques that dominated the music of Renaissance. The 16th century found the Golden years of polyphony. Martin Luther, a flutist as well as a theologian, helped develop a German chorale and encouraged congregational singing in the church.

The music found more secular growth from the time of renaissance. Baroque period was a time of contrast and change. Opera singing developed and instrumental music became as important as vocal music. Rococo style took shape in France. The new experiments with homophonic texture, varied forms and dynamics laied the foundation for the classical composers. The music of classical period became known for its clear formal structure and emotional restraint. Sonata which became the basis of symphony, concreto, and quartet were the greatest developments of the classical period. Hayden, Mozart and Beethoven were the classical masters. The music of the Romantic period reflected the revolutionary nature of the times. Rebelling against classical restraint, composers sought greater freedom and more individual expressiveness. In their effort to unite music with poetry and drama, the Romantic composers turned to program music. The end of 19th century brought a reaction against Romantic music. In the early decades of the 20th century composers experimented freely, introducing new conceptions of rhythm, melody and harmony. New chords and scales were used, polytonal music was produced and polyrhythms came in use. Jazz had a strong impact on serious music. The contrapunctual texture and syncopations of Jazz were used. The neo classical movement which began in the early 1920's became sharply dissonant and rhythmically complex.

The technological progress of the 20th century is reflected in its music, especially in the West. Electronic instruments producing new musical tones have been developed. Using a tape recorder and electronic oscillators composers created a new music called 'musique concrete' or electronic music. Other avant-garde composers experimented with abattery

music. Another development is the use of computer to produce compositions for conventional instruments.

The development of music from 18th century was not particularly and precisely of a religious nature and not typically of devotional character. More of secular values, secular expressions and styles took shape. But one thing we can notice that each of these developments had its influence and repercussions on the devotional music of the church. Modern forms of music got introduced also in liturgical worships.⁹

5. Indian Music: World of Devotional Melodies

In the East, especially in India, music has a great tradition quite different from the West. One cannot consider any aspect of Indian culture without viewing it in the context of its religious base. The drone in Indian music is not just a device which when added to melody and rhythm provides mere pleasant sounds disassociated from religio-philosophical values. The drone called '*Śruti*' (that which is heard) is a musical expression of basic philosophical tenets traceable back to the earliest *Vedas*. In India music was put into the service of religion from earliest times. Vedic hymns stand at the beginning of the record. The Sama Veda is the oldest musical composition that one possess. It is recited even now in the same manner as was done three thousand years ago. In the vedic period the form of music was known as *Samagan*. The Vedas are in fact a collection of mantras and hymns of praises addressed to different gods and goddesses. The Rg veda begins with a musical invocation to *Agni* which is chanted.¹⁰ Much more popular is the vedic hymn known as *Gāyatri mantra* a prayer addressed to the Sun-God.¹¹ The aspirants of sacred learning

9. "Western Music", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* M. 704-714.

10. *Om agnim ile purohitam*

yajñasya devam ytvijam

hotāram ratoadhātāmam

I magnify God, the Divine Fire the Priest, Minister of sacrifice, the offerer of oblation, Supreme giver of Treasure, (*Rg. Veda* 1.1.1.)

11. *Om Tat Savitur varenyam*

Bhargo devasya dhimahi

Dhiyo yo nah pracōdayat

We meditate upon the glorious splendour of the vivifier divine. May he himself illumine our minds (*Rg Veda* 111: 62, 10)

are asked to chant this mantra with devotion before they open the book of the Vedas for meditation. The intellectual quest of the Upaniṣads did not take away this quest for devotional music. The Chandogya Upaniṣad begins as follows:

*Aum itya etat aksaram udgītam upasita
aum iti hrd gayati tasyapavyakhyanam*

Aum, One should meditate on this syllable, the udgita, for one sings the loud chant beginning with aum.¹²

Sarasavati, the consort of *Brahmā* is considered to be the Goddess, of music. She is often pictured seated upon a lotus flower playing a veena, an Indian musical instrument with strings. Later the Indus valley civilization made a refinement in this field. Along with the development of vedic music, indigenous forms of music, having their origin in the pre-Aryan age also developed side by side. This is divided broadly into two categories '*Marga Sangit*' (Celestial or sacred music) and the '*Desi Sangit*' (secular or profane music). Evolved out of ritual and spiritual music and the indigenous folk music, was the classical music of India.

Narada and Bharata are two authorities of the past in the field of music. Narada, the author of '*Sikṣas*' (a book on the science of music) is the one who successfully established a positive relation and uniformity between the two divergent forms of music, namely the *Marga* and *Desi Sangit*. During this period, the raga, or musical mode had come into being and the science of music was being established. Some authors say that the most flourishing age of Indian music was during the period of native princes, some others put it between the 9th and 18th century. During this period Indian music developed as *Hindustani* and *Carnatic*. After a period of latency in the growth of Indian music, the 20th century has contributed to the awakening of music with the help of a number of musicians, vocalists and instrumentalists, musicologists, music academies and traditional *gurus*.

Matured through the past centuries of thought, experience and expression, the classical music of India has become unique in the world.

12. Ch. Up. 1.1.1.

It is remarkable that in spite of many events and influences through centuries, Indian classical music has still retained its character. Writing of musical notations did not grow in Indian music. To keep their traditional integrity, they were imparted orally by teacher to pupil, *Gurukul Ashram* was the place where the teachers and scholars imparted knowledge in music, The purpose of the music was spiritual inspiration either directly through music or by using compositions as a prayer for salvation of the self.

While in the west music developed more in the line of polyphonies, trames and symphonics, Indian music had the development in the field of melodies. The Indian musical scale evolved and developed from time to time starting from the vedic chants of three notes. The scale of seven primary notes, on the basis of *Śruti* intervals came into usage, as the basis of the musical notes. *Rāga* is the essence of classical music as it creates through the combination of musical patterns, varieties of melodies and musical values. The Indian music succeeded through *Rāga*, *śruti*, balance and theory in creating required feeling to evoke emotional expressions. The *rāgas* are classified on the basis of *rasas* (emotions) they produce.¹³ In spite of the laws binding the *rāgas*, musician maintains his skill with the evocation of the necessary emotion which ultimately holds the listener spell bound. It entirely depends on the musician how he interprets the laws and subtilities of *rāga* without disturbing the emotional appeal expressed through the musical forms and improvisations, and maintains a high standard of performance as well.

As the art of music developed over many centuries into a music of profound melodic and rhythmic intricacy, the discipline of a religious text or the guideline of a story determined the structure. In contrast to the western music where the composer or conductor holds the central role, in the Indian music, it is the musician who is central and the virtuosity of a skillful singer rivals that of the instrumentalist. It is not the written notations that stands as the basis of performance but the creative inspirations of the musician.

In Indian music there is very little concept of vocal or instrumental idiom in the western sense. The vertical dimension of chord structure – that

13. Music is intimately related to the experience of emotions, such as *rasa* (*rasanubhuti*). M.R. Gautam, *The musical Heritage of India* (Abhinam Publications, 1980) Delhi pp. 57.

is the effect created by sounding tones simultaneously – has never been developed in Indian music. The divisions of an octave (intervals) are more numerous than in western music and melodic complexity in oriental music goes far beyond that of western practice.¹⁴ The spontaneous imitation carried on between an instrumentalist and narrator against the insistent rhythmic subtleties of the drums becomes a source of greatest excitement. Because of the faithful adherence to the rigid rules governing the rendition of 'ragas' the ancient melodic patterns of Indian music is still preserved in tact.

6. Search for the Source of Music and Devotion

Search for the primordial sound was one of the deep seated basic quest of man as a means of his self communication with the Ultimate self for the realization of his own self. The most powerful and personal style of communication was conceived through audio signals.¹⁵ Both in the West and in the East such thoughts of hearing God and responding to God is prevalent.

Word is the first born of the truth, that is God, the Ultimate Reality according to the western, Judeo-Christian understanding. In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God, everything was made through the word. Word is the primordial utterance of God. It is the inner dynamics of the self communication of God, it is the external expression of the self-effusion of God. The self communicability of God, as the ever emergent word, unfolds itself as revelation with humanity. God uttered the word that is Jesus Christ. Man's response to God's self revelation is faith. Faith finds the expression through the word, through Jesus Christ, through the inner dynamism of communicability of man with God. The word as the response of man's faith, being the ongoing flow of his own being takes the form of emotional melody and heart rhythm, the form of music. Devotional music becomes more powerful a prayer, twice the effect for one act according to St Augustin. The Western mind accepting the intellectual approach developed the spirituality and spiritual experience and spiritual expressions centred more around the word.

14. Narayana Menon, "Music of India", *Fodor's Guide to India* (1976), p. 165.

15. Vasudeva Sastri, *The Science of Music* (Research Publications, Tanjore, 1958), p. 9.

For the Indian mind the primordial utterance of God is not word (*Vacana*) but voice (*Nāda*). From the supreme Reality which is infinite and ineffable the voice emerges as *svayamprakaśatva*, self-lumination or self reflection. The original voice emerges from within. This primordial reflection, contained everything that is real within itself, in its near most communicability, is the primal voice. The Indians called it *Nādabrahma*, the voice of Brahman or Brahman as voice.¹⁶ This first vibrations and sounds put life into being. In this way the one becomes many and then universe was created. This original voice, though emerging from *satya*, the ultimate truth, as its first born, is always the unproduced or unmade, unbeaten sound (*Anahata nāda*) immune from all defects of expression, eternally remaining the same, yet allowing itself to be expressed in all manifold ways. *Anahata Nāda* can be heard from within through yogic practice, not by the naked ear. It is a communication with the inner self.

This *Brahman* (God) as *Nāda* (voice) being the emerging voice of the infinite is by nature ineffable, it is beyond all articulation. The Indian philosophers called it '*sphoṭa*', the original disclosure of reality as the break through of the being into consciousness. *Sphoṭa* as original utterance contains all meaning. It is the unarticulated source of all articulated meaning. Without *sphoṭa* no word will ever have any sense, or meaning. But no word with self-defined meaning can really contain the *sphoṭa*, the ineffable *Nāda* emerging from *satya*.

The problem is how to articulate the ineffable. It is the human need, an exigency, to symbolize the original *sphoṭa*. Man wanted to express in human sound (*dhvani*) the original *Nāda*, which by its internal dynamism refuses all articulations and expressions. The moment it is articulated it becomes what it is not, yet only through what it is not it can be humanly communicated. Hence the minimum articulation of the maximum content will be the most suitable symbol of this unarticulable, eternal, infinite *Nāda*. What the mystic intuitively heard in the inner self is the '*Sruti*'. This *Śruti* when expressed takes the form of

16. Anādi – nidhanam brahma-śabda tatvam yad aksharam
vivartate artha-bhāvena prakriya jagato yatah

The beginningless and endless Brahman is the voice principle; and this voice manifests itself into objects and truth same in the whole creation of the universe (Barthari, *Vakyapadiya*, 1.1.)

music. Every music is based on a particular *śruti* (scale). It is not what is in 'Smṛti' (memory). When the *Nāda Brahma* goes to the level of *smṛti* (intellectual understanding and memory) it receives the form of concept, which is more human and that much less divine. When what is latent in the 'Smṛti' is expressed we have the *kruti*, where the medium is *vāc* or *vacana* (word).

The Indian mind views music as the minimum articulation of the maximum content through the *śruti* of the *Nāda*. Every word-symbol intended to express the in-expressible *Nāda* will particularize it that it will no longer be the *Sphoṭa*. That which particularises it the least and at the same time most approximately expresses its nature will be the truest symbol, and for the Indian mind this is *om*, God in the form of sound.¹⁷ It is the beginning, middle and end going in circles resounding and vibrating the self expression of God. It is the combination of all the vowel sounds which gives life to the consonants. No consonant in the world lives without the principle of life, *Nāda*, (vowel) in them. It is the waves of the *sphoṭa* in the form of *Nāda* that communicate the *śruti* in the style of music. It is the same media of music that can take man into the transcendental level of being to be one with *Brahman*.

This basic difference between the understanding of the origin and original form of music, perhaps explains the varieties we witness in both music styles of West and East. Both the spiritual approaches base the origin of music in the ultimate infinite reality God, and accepts music as an easy and powerful way to reach and realize that ineffable reality. This is perhaps the real basis of the connection between devotion and music. The very spiritual vision diversifies the devotional approaches and musical developments.

Because of the mystical and intuitive approach the Indian spiritual pursuit gave greater emphasis to the individual experience of the divine and its expression. So in music, the aspect of individual expression, namely, the development of melody became more important as a medium of communicating the intricacies of the individual experience. The *Anahata Nada* could be experienced only by a mystic.

17. *Maitrayaniya Upaniṣad* (6.22) presents OM as the *śabdabrahman* which will take man to *asabdabrahman* (Soundless Brahman).

In the West the stress is more on the intellectual perception and verbal conception. Word is the primordial form of Divine communication, more intelligible style of human perception. It could be easily communicated more among the community of faithful. This communitarian aspect gets importance also in the musical expression of their devotion. The western people who happened to be more involved in the conquering of the world concentrated their attention on collecting, co-ordinating and directing the human energy, human persons to achieve their goal. Co-ordination, combination and co-relation of chords, polyphonies and symphonies became so natural in the development of their music and devotion. In the East, conquering the self was the greater ideal. So the self discipline, creativity, self realization, bliss etc. attracted their attention in the pursuit of mystical intuition. The melodies developed.

So the East, especially India has developed a style of melodic music that is more conducive to interior recollection, self-realization of God abiding in one's self. The westerners who were more concerned to capture control and progress with the nature, with the spirit of co-ordinating all the powers so as to create the communitarian solidarity of humanity in the Divine human meeting point, developed a spiritual approach with the choral polyphonic devotional music. Both these aspects of musical development are mutually complementary and humanity is blessed from either side.