

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN MUSIC IN THE EARLY PERIODS: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Music plays a vital role in the life of men. The sound that evolves out of music gives a sensual feeling in every person due to its sublime effect. In the words of Sir Hurber Perry, " the very fact of musical utterance, implies a genuine expansion of the nature of the human being and is in a varying degree a trustworthy revelation of the particular likings, tastes, and sensibilities of the being that gives vent to it."¹ This being the significance and importance of music, the music that evolved and developed in each country has its own historical, socio, cultural background basing on its evolution and practices. This paper is an attempt to study subtly the origins of Indian Music in the early periods especially that of the ancient and Vedic periods.

Key Words: Indian Music; Ancient Periods; Hindu Culture; Vedas

Introduction

From ancient to Modern times, Indian music has developed from various sources, such as, number of divine origins, various scholastic writings by musicians, learned artist's of art, drama, natya sastra, different cultural, religious writers including that of foreign scholars. In spite of having the influence of foreign religious and cultural practices and perceptions, it has not lost its beauty.

Music in India is in existence even before from times immemorial. In spite of a number of authors contributed for its enrichment, it is difficult to trace its origin exactly. Its evolution is much earlier than the evolution of humankind. According to available sources and scholastic views, the origin of music is divine and closely associated in its origin and development with that of Hindu divinity². In view of Indian music's association with that of divine origin, the classification of periodicity of historical origin and development, there is a variance among scholars, musicians, and religious texts. Due to the inconsistency, it is difficult to enumerate the exactness of periodicity in the classification of Indian music. However, according to available sources, the historical development of Indian music may be broadly classified as the following periods³.

In the series, the first period is the Divine period. The Second Period is the Pre Vedic period, before 2000 B.C. ; the third period was Vedic or Pre historic Period i.e., 2000 B.C.-5000 B.C., the fourth period was medieval period, i.e., 5000 B.C.-1500 A.D.; the fifth period is the

contemporary period or modern times 1500A.D., and lastly, 20th century and the present century may be described as the sixth period. The last period may be described as the fifth century of Indian music in view of radical development of science and technology and its impact on music⁴. In view of the vast sources and periods played an important role in the annals of Indian musical development, this paper examines the different sources of early periods primarily, the ancient and Vedic periods in a subtly manner and their contribution to the development of Indian Music.

Mythological period

The music of India has a formidable theoretical base of great antiquity, and the roots of it are linked to divinity. The available surviving texts are more than 2,000 years old⁵. According to religious discourses, folk tradition, Vedas, Puranas, Ithihasa's scholastic writings, and other available sources, music in India is associated with spirituality. The entire religious chronicle has universally linked their devotion to God and other instruments associated with every Indian God. It is near total belief of Hindus that instruments played and used by different Gods and Goddesses, and the Nada or *Sabdha* that produced by each instrument played a significant part in creating classical music of India.

According to one story, music being the property of God, in its early periods of divine origin it was closely interlinked with that of fine arts, such as especially, dancing, singing, play-lets, and playing of instruments as all of these forms of fine arts are the creation of God⁶.

The Common Indian belief is that the creator of nature Lord Brahma is the creator of music as the God of creation. However, an examination of a number of religious texts specifies that classical music is associated with a number of God's and Goddess. Among the various God's who contributed richly for the origin and development of music, Lord Mahadev (Popularly Known as Lord Shiva) invented a music instrument from the hunting bow, which is said to be the first string instrument. The *sabdha* or *Nadha* that originated from the instrument culminated into music.

From another episode, it is of the view that Lord Shiva in his various forms, especially that of *Natraj* form known for dance has created music as a destroyer and creator of the Universe. In another episode, it is a belief of many Hindus that being a healer of many problems, Lord Shiva created the words or Nada, referred to as AUM or OM⁷ from his naval to be chanted by all the humans on earth to have relief from their sins. Accordingly, it is stated that Om being the representation of the trimurhti's (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva), the nada or sabda that comes out of it has given birth to music and to notes accompanied to music. The Omkar is referred to as *Tanswar* which symbolizes God. The *Tanswar* is subdivided into *Tan and Pravachan*.

From another story, it is of the view that music in India evolved based on literature linked with fine arts surrounded dance-drama of Lord Mahadeva. This is otherwise referred to as Shiva Pradosh linked with a traditional art which is observed in honour of Lord Shiva to receive his

blessings. Yet another belief is that Indian music is evolved from the Rudra Veena creation of a string instrument of Lord Mahadev basing on the limbs of his wife and the tones that give sound took birth as music.

According to Vaishnavites, Lord Mahavishnu being supreme Eternal God of the entire Universe, music is also his creation. In order to popularize it in all the worlds, especially among mankind, he had handed over the responsibility to Lord Brahma as a creator to do needful. Basing, on the command, Brahma started thinking ways and means for the promotion of music among his creations. It appears that in the beginning human mind was originally said to have been devoid of any aesthetic sense. It is said that Brahma, the creator, one day complained: “it is true that I have created all these wonderful things and showered beauty everywhere. However, what is the use? My children, the human beings, simply pass time by; they do not seem to be sensitive to all the beauty around. All this seems to have been waste on them. Saraswathi, the Hindu Muse, took the hint and assured Brahma that she would create in man the power to respond to, appreciate, and to sustain it for generations. That is why there is a veena, symbolic of fine art, in Saraswati’s hand, which the image-makers invariably place on her hand. Accordingly, Lord Brahma is considered as the creator of music⁸.

In view of the mythological connection that classical Indian music possess, any person without full knowledge of music and sung any raga in an improper fashion, that would lead not only to degrade the subject of music but to bring in incurable problems to the ragas and raginis. An examination of the story of Narada, amply brings this in a clear manner. Once Narada, the divine sage thought he accomplished the music completely. He was over jealous with the knowledge that he possess. In order to teach Narada a lesson, once Lord Vishnu to make him realise about the knowledge he possess took him to visit the abodes of gods. They entered a spacious building, where in a number of men and women who are all weeping looking at their broken limbs. Vishnu stopped for a while and enquired them the reason for their sorrow. The in turn replied that they were the Ragas and Raginis of music created by Mahadeva, but one egoistic Narada without understanding the depth and breadth of the science of music sung them in a reckless manner in a performance. Since their features are distorted and sung in a reckless manner, their limbs were broken. They were waiting for Mahadeva or a skillful person to sung them in a proper form, in order to restore their former state of body. Narada ashamed of his knowledge and kneeled down and asked him to be forgiven for his mistake. This story aptly brings in that it is difficult to understand the breadth and depth of the science of Indian music and cannot be claimed mastery over the subject by anybody⁹. From the above fantasy, without proper understanding of the presentation of rag and ragini, if any one tries to act or present music in an improper fashion, it not only brings disrepute to the person and to music itself. This story further clearly signifies that future generations at any given point of time should not take classical music lightly.

The contribution of the divinity was chalked out in a systematic manner and was handed over in a written form by great sages like Narada, Bharata and Hanuman. The scanty material was

developed by these sages in the form of Gandharava Veda was unfortunately lost and could not be traced¹⁰. However, basing on the reminiscences of divine origins of music and the writings of sages have been redrafted by the almighty and handed over to mankind in the form of songs, sounds, and other scriptures to make men on earth to enjoy the *rasa bhava* of music.

Music during Pre Vedic Period

After the divine period, during primitive periods of human civilization, God descended music to earth through sound or blowing of wind¹¹. It was further regarded, the imitation of the sounds of various animals also led to the development of primitive music including that of the ancient Indian Music¹². Accordingly, primitive music may be divided into two types. One is emotional (arising from the language of heroes), and the other is sensuous (swaying or wavering of the body and the patten of feet).

After primitive periods, the Indus-valley civilization which is considered as an advanced civilization ranging between 5,000 B.C.-3,000 B.C., contributed quite sufficiently for the development of classical Indian music much before the Vedic periods. According to scholars, the materials that were derived such as, a distorted flute, dancing women in bronze, some sort of a stringed instrument resembling veena were considered as significant contributing factors for the development of music comparable to that of the period of divinity. In the Words of Sir John Marshall, the then Director General of Archaeology in India, basing on the excavations of the Indus valley, particularly on the Bronze statue of a dancing girl, “..... the people of India in the ancient past were in possession of relatively mature culture with a high standard of art and craftsmanship.....” in no uncertain terms amply specifies the contribution of Indus valley civilization for the development of classical Music¹³. Apart from the above, the worship of Rudra, Sun God, and Goddess Sarswati clearly denotes that music believed to be created by divinity has precluded down to mankind through nature and various forms¹⁴.

Music during Vedic Period

After the first two historic periods, Vedic period is considered as the most authoritative period for the development of music in a systematic manner. This period ranges between 2000 B.C. to 600 A.D. This period is also known as post Indus valley civilization or the period of Aryans. During this period, culture, religion and philosophy were inter woven with each other due to the dominance of Deva bhasha i.e., Sanskrit . Even today, it is a belief that during this period also the gods use to mingle with men through whom they passed on the musical culture for its further development and for the happiness of mankind.¹⁵

The word veda is derived from the word “Vid” which literally means, “Root.” Thus, Vedas contains the various facets of life in which music in one component¹⁶. During this period, music was mainly developed through Vedic hymns and mantras. Through these mantras and hymns, the scales of music were developed through musical notes. These scales later became

the fundamental principles in the further development of music.

Study of Vedic period reveals that music had a notable place in the society of Aryans. Every family, especially that of the Brahmans were supposed to learn the Vedic hymns without failure. Their singing, dancing and playing on instruments, was done in a strict discipline. However, the sama gana sung by Brahmins had brought in changes in the system of music for its augmentation and perfection for the future generations. The association of literature with music was firmly established during this age. No activity or festival was conducted without sacred art of music. Women were given much prominence to learn all forms of music (Vocal, instrumental and Dancing) considering them as the representation of Goddesses.

It was the belief that the primitive tribes used to sing these mantras in one high tune, which were popular as ek swari gaayana. A number of sacred hymns were tuned in this fashion, which was later crystallized into Gatha gayana which is a system of singing with two notes, consists of a high and low tune. This further crystalised into Sama gana gayana chant, which were sung in three main notes. The notes were udatta¹⁷ (raised), anudatta¹⁸ (lowered) and swarita¹⁹ (level). According to Mandukya Shiksha, treatise music of the period, the three forms became the base scales referred to as Graamas²⁰. With the help of these notes, the rishis later developed the sargam syllables or note names of music, which further evolved into seven notes as the base of Indian music over a period of time²¹.

According to available sources, music during Vedic period was developed under six principal schools²². They were, (1) Vedic or Sama Veda School; (2) Gandharva Naradha School; (3) Dohia Brahma School; (4) Muni Bharata School; (5) Nandikeswara School; and (6) Matanga School. However, the development of music during the vedic period can be mainly attributed to the four texts, Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. Though all the Vedic scriptures contain various aspects of music, mainly the Rig and Sama Veda²³ are considered as the most dominant ones that had richly contributed for the development of music.

Rig Veda:

Among the Vedas, Rig-Veda is considered as the oldest Veda. The Rig Veda samhita is the oldest text among the Vedas. Being the early text of Vedas, it is regarded as the treasure of knowledge or gyan. It is a collection of 1,017 Vedic Sanskrit hymns and 10,600 verses in all. It is further divided into ten books. All hymns were in poetic literature sung in a song sequence. The hymns dedicated to Rig-Vedic deities. The hymns are the work of various rishis. In the entire work, last two parts deal with the systematization of music. About one fourth of the verses were devoted to Gayatri Mantra, which is described as the Gayatri Meter; consisting of 3 meters of 8 syllabus each; 4 syllabus free and last 4 fixed in cadence. It appears during this period in the beginning, Vedic hymns were sung or pronounced in monotone, and referred to as archika period. In due course of time, it was developed to three tones (one main tone, and two accents, one higher and the other lower called Udatta and Anudatta respectively.) This was done to

accentuate the words since the text was of primary importance²⁴. This type of pronunciation later developed into Gana and Gatha.

The gana and gatha i.e., sam gyi mana gayatram gya manam stoma syd manaso etc., became the popular forms in the later periods of Rig Veda. In due course of time, in order to balance the tonal aspects of these two notes a supportive note referred to as svarita was developed. After the evolution of this note, the period was referred to as samik period. All these forms were formed part of stoma or stotra, since singing a song was equivalent to chanting of a mantra in a particular fashion. At times, the stutirupam vacham also explains the meaning or significance of the sacrifices made by the people were described through singing in gana. Some times gana was used in the sense of prayers on the name of stuti or chanting in praise of deities. In view of its significant contribution to the knowledge of various branches, the Rig Veda manuscripts have been selected for inscription in UNESCO's "Memory of the World" Register in 2007²⁵.

Sama Veda

Among the four Vedas, the Sama Veda is considered as the most important Veda contributed authoritatively for the development of music. It is the origin of Indian music. Sama Veda is the extension of Rig Veda. It deals with proper manner of reciting Vedic hymns in praise of almighty. The entire relationship of music during Sama Veda period was described in a book called "Narada Uekua". It is unfortunate that the book is not available in modern times²⁶. A number of scholars are of the view that this book describes relationship between the swaras and music developed during the period of samaveda. According to available sources, during the period of Sama Veda music was considered as synonymous for samaganas, which means group singing. Jaiminiya Sutra defines and uses the term Saman only in the sense of Giti.

It was through these samaganas (group singing or chorus singing) wherein the rhythmic nature of music was developed. In the sama sa and ma are taken sama where *sa* means richa and *ma* means music. Hence, sama ganas or chanting mantras in Sanskrit in a rhythmic manner became the base of modern music. The Sama Ganas are also known as Udgatta.

The Vedic music samagana evolved through the medium of songs singing process of chanters and singers. Sama evolved out of riks or riks stanzas. The Vedic notes of the samagana were used in three registers (stanzas). Accordingly, it can be stated that Vedic song samagana was very systematic. Different samaganas were sung in sacred occasions of the sacrifices to please Gods, priests and public. The samagana supplied the materials of music of later classical period. The creator of this universe perceived music from swaraksharas Sa and Ma from Sama Veda. These Sama Ganas of three notes later crystallized another note described as svaranharita, which is of four notes. This was further developed into a pentatonic scale which is of five notes. This had the power to produce itself into a raga. These Vedic samaganas have had their base in a fixed scale with a frame of five, six, and seven Vedic tones. These tones were in descending order. The seven Vedic tones were caturtha, tritiya, divitiya, prathama, mandra, atisvarya, krushta. These names were different from those of the laukika swaras. The equivalent notes of Vedic and laukika

are as follows:

Vedic notes	Laukika notes
Prathama	madhyama
Dvitiya	gandhara
Triteeya	rishbha
Caturtha	shadja
Mandra	dhaivata
Astivarya	nishada
Krushta	pancama

The next important stage is Saman or the period of Tune. In this period, gana is present. It is a collection of hymns and tunes created while singing Veda. The words of the Vedic verses were split, extended, repeated, omitted, or often changed beyond all recognition. There are four types of songs for four different purposes.

- 1) Grama geya-- songs sung in hamlets
- 2) Aranya geya---songs sung in forests
- 3) Uha geya---songs sung in contemplation
- 4) Uhya geya---the mystic songs

In the beginning, the samagana, used three notes in connection with the terms as udatta, anudatta and svarita. The first term udatta meant high-pitched tone, anudatta, low-pitched tone, and svarita, middle tone. These three notes used to be considered as the base notes²⁷. It was regarded that the first three notes formed a particular scale in Indian Music. Wherever there is a letter to recite musically, its swara is indicated one of the seven numbers above it. However, the system of signing was highly complicated and need to learn only through a guru. The signing of Sama veda hymns was more complicated, since the words were modified suitably to match the musical continuity. These modifications are in six numbers, which are, one vikara²⁸; two viuleuaia²⁹; third vikaruaia³⁰; fourth abhyasa³¹; fifth viriaia³² and finally stobha³³. Apart from the above, sama gana reciting is very special and need to be sung in five section. These were referred to as prastava, (prelude sung by prastota); Udgeta (principal theme of song sung by

udgatha); Pratihara, (first response sung by the pratihara); Upadrava, (sung by udgatha); and Nidhana, (it is a closing chorus). The mantra is spilt into five components and each one of them needs to be sung by five individuals. These five components are sung sequentially thrice. Then it was referred to as sthoma³⁴.

Yajurveda

During this Vedic period, the rishis used to sacrifice their knowledge. Yajur means, sacrifice and Veda represents knowledge. This is also referred to as karma Veda. The entire text of the Veda runs in prose in two or three line mantras and mostly used to by the Adhavaryu, the priests of the period. These mantras explain various rituals that humankind need to adopt themselves to reach salvation. Even in prose, since the mantras have to be recited in a systematic rhythmic style, they conveyed a certain amount of musical tones accompanied with musical instruments, especially in a number of cultural activities of the period.

Atharva Veda

Among the four Vedas, Atharva Veda is the last one and named after rishi atharvan. The hymns contained in this Vedic period are magical remedies and chants for curing illness. All hymns in this period sung in a systematic manner with the help of a guru. This text portrays the life style of Vedic periods and explains various beauty facets in which the hymns were sung.

Apart from the above music features, music used to be sung with a number of musical instruments in order to bring rime and rhythm to the cultural events of the Vedic period. A number of string, wind, and percussion instruments were employed. Apart from the above, Vedic samagans had different scales consisting of five, six and seven tones and were in a descending series. These notes though are different from laukika notes; they led for the formation of music in the later periods.

The Post Vedic Texts

The texts that followed the Vedas generally are the commentaries, grammars and other Scriptures. Among the various writings, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, the Pratisakhya, Purnas, and sikshas form part as the most important texts, which dealt with music followed by the Vedas. In these texts, the Chhandogya, Brihadaranyaka and the Taittiriya Upanishad are some of them are responsible for developing the fundamental concepts of music. During this period, music notes were referred to similar to that of the Vedic period like high pitch and low pitch tones. Among all texts, Taittriyapratishakya has references to seven sounds are given as upangshu, dhavani, nimad, upabidmad, mandra, madhyama and tara correspond to inaudible, murmur, whisper, numb ling, soft, milled and loud.

Brihadaranyak text though philosophical in its approach, it attempted to explain the inherent meanings of prana, vaya, and svara etc. The reference to the word 'svaravijnana' amply makes it clear that this text had contributed richly for the development of fundamental aspects of music. Saunaka in his Pratisakhya considered the significance of music, expounded the meaning

of the commentaries of various texts, and developed a number of fundamental aspects of the grammar of music.

Apart from the stated few texts, a number of authors of various texts explained the nuances of grammar of music in detail including the systemization of patterns of rhythm. Among the various authors, Yajnavalkya, Panini, Jajnyabalka, Manduki, Narada etc, whose treatises are popular even today which have dealt in detail in the concepts of music³⁵. These texts laid the foundations for the development of Indian music in the latter periods.

Conclusion

The above brief examination of the early history of origin and development of Indian music amply makes it clear that from its early evolution to modern times; it underwent a number of changes. The subtle examination of evolution of music in its primitive periods to modern times, it to be remembered that music born through singing. Man in his attempt to give a shape to his voice, discovered a number of means and methods of expression, especially through different schools of thought namely, Hindustani, Carnatic³⁶ and other schools of thought. In spite of difference in their aesthetics and presentation among the various schools of music, the foundation of raga evolved during the Vedic period being the common origin for all systems of schools even in the contemporary era.

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6. For example, the two musical instruments, i.e., the flute in the hands of Krishna and the damaru in the hands of Lord Mahadeva, the vina in the hands of Goddess Saraswathi are considered as divine even today and are the most sought after instruments that are used commonly in Indian music.
7. It is also firm belief of many Hindu scholars that Lord Mahadeva created these letters, since each of them represent the three pristine deities viz. A stands for Brahma, U for Lord Vishnu and M for Mahadeva. It is also viewed that these three being created by Lord Goddess Gayatri, the chanting of AUM is nothing but the chanting of the Gayatri who is considered as the originator of life in every aspects including music. At the same time some of the scholars are of the opinion, the sages have pronounced to depict the bakthi marga through pranayam during their long meditation. For details see Ram Avatar Veer: The Music of India, Vol.1, 1986, pp 59-65.
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12. According to Naradisiksa Sadjam Vadati mayuro etc., i.e., the call of the peacock is similar to the tonality or pitch of the note, sadja, that of the bull to that rsabha; that of the goat to that of gandhara; that of the crate to that of madhyama; that of the cuckoo to that of Panchama; that of the horse to that of dhaivata and that of the Kunjara or elephant to that of nisada. For details see Swami Prajnanananda: Historical Development of Indian Music, 1973, pp.37.-39; also see Arun Bhattacharya: A Treatise on Ancient Hindu Music, 1978, p. 12.
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17. a note recited in high pitch is called as udat. It is the symbol of vertical linemarked over the note which is to be pronounced in high pitch.
18. a Note recited in low pitch is called anudat It is symbolized by a horizontal line marked under the note to be pronounced in low pitch
19. The Horizontal line has been shown as the sign of anudat
20. In order to understandable to common man, these scales were represented in numerals as 1,2 and 3.
21. Ram Avtar Veer: The Music of India (Vol.1) (I edn) 1986, pp 41-83
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26. S chandrasekharan, op. cit n.23
27. Some scholars are of the view that the above three notes did correspond to the llaukik notes rishava , nishada (N) and Sadja (S) of frequency proportion 10/9.8/9,and 1. For details see Arun Bhattacharya op.cit. n 15 at p.21-24.
28. This is a total modification of a word;
29. Splitting a word
30. Elongating a word after splitting it and the same word is repeated twice or thrice.
31. Repeating the same word twice or thrice
32. Taking the pause in the middle of a word

33. Filler words to complete the cadence, like ou, hova, haavu, a. for details
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