



## IMPORTANCE OF STRING INSTRUMENTS IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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**ABSTRACT** Music is the art and science of combining vocal or instrumental sounds or tones-varying in melody, pitch, harmony, rhythm and timbre with a view to forming structurally and emotionally expressive phrases as well as compositions. In the history of human culture, music happens to be the earliest fine art to be developed. Music has played an important role in the history of mankind throughout the world. It was an integral part of the lives of the people in every ancient civilization. It is also said that the culture of a nation is best described in music and allied fine arts. Available evidences confirm that each civilization had a great cultural heritage of its own and music was one of the in separable limbs of any culture. India is a land of music and music is an essential part of the life of her people.

**KEYWORDS :** STRING, MUSIC, CARNATIC, INSTRUMENT

The growth of Indian music has been a gradual, continuous process of development from a very elementary stage. Today, it is been considered to be one of the most sophisticated melodic music system in the world of music. Indian music, like other kinds of art forms, has been handed down over hundreds of years with all the respect and love that a great heritage merits. There has been a very long evolution before our tradition achieved maturity and yielded variety. Indian music, being a very ancient art, has a very long, unbroken tradition behind it. There are three major classes of stringed instruments. One group of these is not used for creating a melody or a *raga* but is employed as drones and rhythmic adjuncts. Another family we who may term polychords, comprise harps, lyres, dulcimers and similar instruments on which melody can be played but wherein there exists a one-string-for-one-tone relation. Then there is the largest genus: that of monochords; that is, one string is sufficient for playing the whole melody. Be it noted that there may be more than one string on the instrument; but every one of them can be used to produce a melody independently of the other strings. Today, the sound of Odissi is considered a middle ground between the Hindustani and Carnatic styles. Among all the art forms, music is considered to be the most effective medium for communicating and creating a mood of instant bliss and aesthetic joy in the listener through its melodic, harmonic and rhythmic contents. It is authoritatively stated that, as expressing human emotions there is no other aspect of art or philosophy which can excel music. Music has its own language, the language of the heart, and its appeal is universal. Since ancient times music has pervaded all facets of life—be it social, cultural, religious or martial events. The most distinctive characteristic of Indian music is that it is purely melodic where as music of west is Harmonic. Melody denotes a succession of notes and tones systematically arranged so as to produce a pleasing effect. The later centuries, due to various reasons, the classical music of India, though one in the spirit, has developed along two separate lines—Carnatic and Hindustani. The difference between these two forms of classical music is mainly stylistic. There have been historical, political and cultural events that have influenced Hindustani music to evolve a separate style of its own. Hindustani music was influenced and developed due to the influx of the Muslim invaders from 12th century onwards. But the south, not very much a prey to Islamic culture, kept up and developed the original traditional style. Carnatic music is considered to be one of the most advanced and sophisticated classical music systems in the world today. The soul of Carnatic music is its Gamakas (Unique oscillations) & 'Improvisation'. It has over 20000 scales called Raga, and innumerable Talas (cycle of rhythm beats). Countless composers enriched Carnatic music with innumerable compositions varying in the form, Raga and Tala. Since then a large number of musicians of high calibre—both instrumentalists and vocalists emerged and enriched the great heritage of Carnatic music and took the music to great heights, thereby securing a highly reputed place for Carnatic music at the international level. Today it has stood out as one of the most advanced systems of music in the world. The growth and development of Carnatic music through the centuries is a testimony to the greatness of the musical mind. Carnatic music is full of improvisation. It is at once ancient, traditional and also always new. It is both imitative and creative. The genius of Carnatic music lies in its 'Manodharma Sangeetha' (Spontaneous exposition). In a

traditional Carnatic classical music concert, more than two-thirds of the duration is devoted to 'improvisation.' Here, every musician is an interpreter as well as an embodiment of style. He has a freedom of expression his own, though the degree of freedom allowed varies depending his entire role, the form and purpose. The numerous stringed instrument or tala vadya or chordophones of various types, many of which can be traced to primitive cultures, can be classed into drones, rhythmic instruments which do not create melody; polychords wherein a string corresponds to every note in producing melody; and monochords or fingerboard instruments in which a single string can produce the whole melody though there may be many strings on an instrument. The common and simple drones are the tune (a folk instrument), the Gopi Yantra (of Bengal, Odisha), the Jamadika (Andhra), and the Premtal, the Buang played by the Santals. The well-developed drones include the single-stringed eka tar or eka nada, the Tamboori, and the four-stringed Tamboora or Tanpoora. It is famous for its rich sound quality which depends upon the positioning of the Jeevan or Javari—the thread on the bridge under the strings. The polychords (also, veena—referred to in the Vedas and identified by some with the Dravidian Yazh) are the most primitive stringed instruments and mainly comprise the harps and lyres—said to have never existed in India. The harps are referred to in the ancient books depicted in the ancient monuments, and music of the earliest times depended upon them. Though generally arched with a resonator and an arm there are also the box-type (dulcimer type) harps which have no arm. Chief among them is the Santoor, specific to Kashmir, which has a large number of strings played with thin sticks. There is also the smaller svaramandal.

Tala *vadya* are so many in numbers and variety that it is futile to search for their beginning and sometimes even classification becomes complicated. Today there are in the world harps, lyres, psalteries, dulcimers, zithers and lutes and in each class there are so many varieties; methods of playing these are also numerous. It is therefore only natural to suppose that stringed instruments might have grown out of many kinds of tools and contraptions. There are various theories about this but none entirely comprehensive nor completely accepted. Some have traced the source to the hunting bow, some to ground harps, some to bamboo zithers and thus the search and discussions have gone on. The hunting bow is an ancient and familiar tool and many harps are believed to have really evolved out of this. The ground harp, a primitive instrument, is a pit in the ground covered with animal hide; a flexible wooden pole is planted by the side of the pit and from the free end of this a rope is tensed into the leather, thus bending the pole like half a bow and the rope like a bow string; this rope is plucked. The instrument, known as the ground harp, has so far not been observed in India. The bamboo zither is a small length of bamboo; its skin is spliced into two thin strips of bamboo and striking these strings with a small stick. In our country this instrument, which might be the mother of all zithers, is known as the *Gintang* (Assam), the *Ronza gontam* (Andhra) and by other names. The evolution of chordophones has thus come by so many devious paths and ways that we need not here inter into the complicated maze. We now enter into the study of melodic stringed instruments which is an extensive field as also one which has had an indelible influence on the course of Indian music. It

may not therefore be out of place to say a few words on this, though we may not go into the detailed controversial technicalities of the subject. For our purpose it will be enough, to take note of two of the very major genres of *tata vadya*. The first may be called the polychords and the other monochords, which were briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Because of the basic differences in structure and in the musical potentialities of each class, two fundamentally different tonal systems were developed in India. Each had its own terms of reference, though during the process of historical change the two musicologist often got mixed up and textual studies lead to much controversial confusion. Since the polychords had one-string-one-note correspondence, theories of music based on discrete tones and shifts of musical scales as was possible with harps were developed. This was called the *moorcchana paddhati* or the system of modal shifts. On the other hand, instruments like the *eka tantri*, the *sarode*, the *sitar*, etc. had a one string-multi-note relationship. The process of fretting reduced all tonal measurements to their positions on the string. This naturally led to another system founded on fret positions and to a theory known as the *mela paddhati* (the method of scales). The former practice of musical scales held away till about the fifteenth century; but in due course the latter gained ground and eventually replaced the other. Sometimes the instrument has a gourd affixed to the top for balance or for tone enhancement. There are two kinds of polychords being discussed: they are the harps and the lyres. A harp can be visualized as a bow with a number of strings all running parallel to the bowstring; this, of course, does not commit us to thinking that they organized from the bow, for what we are talking of is the shape and construction.

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