



A BRIEF HISTORY OF HINNDUSTANI MUSIC

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The music of India is one of the oldest unbroken musical traditions in the world. The origins of this system go back to the Vedas. Many different legends have grown up concerning the origins and development of Indian classical music. Such legends show the importance that music has to Indian culture. Modern historical and cultural research has also given a good perspective on the field, showing that Indian music has developed within a very complex interaction between different peoples of different races and cultures. It appears that the ethnic diversity of present day India has been there from the earliest of times. The basis for Indian music is sangeet. Sangeet is a combination of three art forms: vocal music, instrumental music and dance. Although these three art forms were originally derived from the single field of stagecraft, today these three forms have differentiated into complex and highly refined individual art forms. The present system of Indian music is based upon two important pillars: There is a system of seven notes which are arranged in a means not unlike Western scales. However when a westerner looks closely he sees that it is quite different what he is familiar with Tala (rhythmic forms) are also quite developed. Many common rhythmic patterns exist. They revolve around repeating patterns of beats. Tala is equivalent to the Western concept of rhythm. Most pieces of Indian music, whether a long improvisation or a devotional song, have a rhythmic structure, i.e. a plan of organized beats that the players use as a foundation. Most of Siddha Yoga music is composed in simple groups of six, eight, nine, twelve, or sixteen beats. But given its ancient and divine origins, one should not be surprised to learn that the Indian system of rhythm frequently uses such sophisticated and complex patterns in groups of seven, ten, or fourteen. The interpretation of rag and tal is not the same all over India. Today there are two major traditions, or systems, of music. There is the North Indian, and the South Indian tradition. The North Indian tradition is known as Hindustani sangeet and the south Indian is called Carnatic sangeet. Both systems are fundamentally similar but differ in nomenclature and performance practice. In Siddha Yoga music is followed the Hindustani system. Many musical instruments are peculiar to India. The most famous are the sitar and tabla. However there are many more that the average person may not be familiar with. All of this makes up the complex and exciting field of Indian classical music. Its understanding easily consumes an entire lifetime. By looking at mythology one can really see the significance that Indian music (sangeet) has to Indian society. This is illustrated in the story concerning its origin. In the Natya Shastra , which is the oldest surviving text on stagecraft in the world the author Bharata writes: Once, a long time ago, during the transitional period between two Ages it so happened that people took to uncivilized ways, were ruled by lust and greed, behaved in angry and jealous ways with each other and not only gods but demons, evil spirits. Although it was decided to give the celestial art of sangeet to mankind, a suitable human had to be found who was capable of receiving this gift. Sangeet had always been in the realm of the demigods (gandharva). A super-human of superior spiritual ability was required to convey this celestial artform to the world of man. It fell upon the great sage Narada to be the first mortal recipient of this divine

art. Through Narada, we are indebted for the presence of classical music. There are many important events in the history of Indian music. These milestones show the development of musical thought from early history to the present day.

The early history of Indian music may be explained by the Indo–European theory. According to this theory, there was a culture, or group of cultures who were so successful that they spread throughout Europe and parts of Asia. Although no one knows where they came from, present thought tends to place their origins somewhere in Eurasia, either north of the Black sea or north of the Caspian. Within this family there are several major groups. Indo–Aryan is a group which has special significance for India because this is the language and culture which generated the Vedas and other classical texts of ancient India. The classical music of India is said to have its roots in this culture. The connection between Indo–European expansion and Indian music may be seen in mythology. Mythology refers to music being brought to the people of India from a place of celestial beings. This mythical land (Gandharva Desh) is usually equated with heaven. However, some are of the opinion that this mythical land could actually be Kandahar in what is the modern Afghanistan. Therefore, the myths of music being given to the world by the celestial beings (gandharva) may actually represent a cultural connection with this ancient Indo–Aryan homeland. Further evidence may be seen in musical structure. In the first few centuries B.C., Indian music was based upon seven modes (scales). It is probably no coincidence that Greek music was also based upon seven modes. Furthermore, the Indian scales follow the same process of modulation that was found in ancient Greek music. The link to Sanskrit is another strong indication of Indo–European roots. Many of the earliest texts were written in Sanskrit. It is also generally believed that classical music is derived from the Samaveda (a part of the Vedas). The nature of music in prehistoric India may be obscure but the picture begins to become clear in the first few centuries B.C.. Bharata's *Natya Shastra* (circa 200 B.C.), provides a detailed account of stagecraft in that period. Here we find mention of seven shuddha and eleven mixed jatis (modal forms not produced by simple modulation). There is also a very detailed discussion of the musical instruments of the time. The first millennium provides us with several texts which show the evolution of Indian music. The *Brihaddeshi* written by Matanga (circa 700 A.D.) is very important. It is in this work that we first find the word "rag" mentioned. Another important text is the *Sangeet Ratnakar* by Sharangdev. This work, written around the thirteenth century, gives extensive commentaries about numerous musical styles that existed at that time.

Perhaps one of the most significant milestones in the development of Indian music was the life of Amir Khusru (born circa 1253, died 1325). He was a poet–musician who served at the court of Sultan Allaudin Khilji (1296–1316). There is a tendency among Indians to attribute the development of almost everything to him. He is erroneously referred to as the inventor of instruments like the sitar and tabla and of numerous musical forms which did not develop until many centuries after his death. Although the extent of his contribution to Indian music is more legendary than factual, he nevertheless symbolizes a crucial turning point in the development of Indian music. Amir Khusru is an icon representing a growing Persian influence on the music. This influence was felt to a greater extent in the North than in the South. The consequence of this differing degree of influence ultimately resulted in the bifurcation

of Indian music into two distinct. the Hindustani sangeet of the North and the Carnatic sangeet of the South .

The musical career of Tansen is another landmark in the development of Indian music. He is significant because he symbolizes the maturing of the north Indian system as a distinct entity from south Indian music. Tansen is considered to be one of the greatest musicians that ever lived. He was the court musician of the famous Mogul Emperor Akbar . He was so highly valued in the court that he was called one of the “Nine Jewels” in his court. It is in the period of Tansen that the famous catalogue of musical instruments known as Ain-i-Akbari, was compiled by Abul Fazl for the Emperor Akbar. The details of Tansen’s life are incomplete. He was born in a Hindu community and had his musical training under his guru Swami Haridas. He then went to the court of the Raja Ram Baghela, a great patron of the arts. From there he migrated to the court of Akbar. It is said that Tansen could work miracles with his singing. This is called nada siddhi in Sanskrit. He is supposed to have acquired such supernatural abilities through the devotion for his guru. It is said that on occasion he could create rain by singing the monsoon raga Megh Malhar. It is also said that he could create fire by singing raga Dipak. Many ragas are ascribed to Tansen. Such as Mian ki Malhar, Mian ki Todi and Darbari Kanada are the most famous. Today the followers of his style are said to belong to the Senia Gharana .The eighteenth century marks the birth of many of the musical forms that we think of today. Dadra, khayal, thumri and a host of other forms are traceable to this period. The early part of the 20th century brings the most recent revolution in north Indian music. This is provided by two people: V. N. Bhatkhande and V. D. Paluskar. These two men revolutionized the concept of Indian music. Paluskar is responsible for the introduction of the first music colleges while Bhatkhande is responsible for the introduction of an organized system which reflects current performance practice. Both men are also responsible for the development and popularization of a modern musical notation. Sangeet is a word which doesn’t really translate into English. In its most general sense it is considered synonymous with the term “music”; however it is actually a threefold artform of vocal music, instrumental music, and dance. Since classical dance is also a component, it is not strictly synonymous to the Western term “music”. There is a historical reason why sangeet is composed of these three artforms. In the Vedic and post Vedic period it was customary to perform mythological dramas. These dramas used dancers to mime the story, instrumentalist to play the musical accompaniment, and vocalist to tell and sing the story. There is a standard terminology whenever one wishes to be specific. Dance is referred to as nritya, vocal is referred to as gayaki, and instrumental is known as vadhya sangeet.