

MUSICOLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY: A STUDY ON THE INFERENCES OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

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Abstract

Mythology and Indian classical music are closely related; ragas and compositions are used to invoke tales from holy books like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Musicians animate ancient epics, emotions, and divine figures with song and rhythm. Indian mythology places a great deal of importance on music, which frequently acts as a divine conduit between the spiritual and the material worlds. Hindu mythology acknowledges music as a religious practice that strengthens devotion and spiritual ties, in addition to being an art form. It illustrates how deeply Hinduism values musical traditions on a cultural and religious level. In India, music has always been an integral component of everyday life. In addition to being a spiritual experience and a way for the knowledgeable seers to realize God, it has been seen as a calming form of entertainment for the average person. Siva, Krishna, and Saraswati are mentioned in the puranas in relation to the flute, veena, and Nada. Tumburu, Narada, Nandi, and other celestials were also skilled musicians. All of these elements endowed Indian classical music with a sacred quality. Ancient Indian legends have been depicted having intricate connection with music. The paper attempts to study the significance and implications of Indian Classical music in Indian mythology. The rich heritage of Indian philosophies and ideologies blended with the musical connotations are an extensive source of learning which is focused on in this paper.

Objective of the study: The objective of the study is to investigate how Indian classical music, in its diversity of traditions, employs instruments, ragas, compositions to communicate stories from Indian mythology, conjuring characters, divine forces, and timeless tales from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, and other sacred writings.

Methodology: The study is qualitative and relies significantly on secondary data gathered from numerous Indian mythological texts, management books, journals, and the internet.

Keywords: Indian Classical music, Hindu Mythology, Art, Vedic literature, Indian Philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

नाहं वसामि वैकुण्ठे योगिनां हृदये न च | मद्भक्ता यत्र गायन्ति तत्र तिष्ठामि नारद ||

Naham vasami vaikunthe yoginam hridaye na cha mad-bhakta yatra gayanti tatra tishthami Narada.

Neither do I reside in Vaikuntha nor in the hearts of the Yogis,
but I dwell where my devotees sing my name, O Narada!!

-Padma Puran, Uttara Khanda, 92. 21-22.

One of the oldest musical genres in the world, Indian classical music has a history of almost two millennia and is distinctive in its profoundly spiritual aspect. Indian music is inextricably linked to the entirety of Indian culture and philosophy, with which it has been associated in various ways since the beginning of recorded history. The history of Indian music spans several millennia and has been explored in Sanskrit theoretical treatises for approximately two thousand years. It is a confluence of art, literature, science, mythology, religion, and philosophy. Classical music, like all other Indian classical performing arts, is a journey of the jeevatma towards the divine, or paramatma. Indian music is a representation of the soul's feelings while surrounded by nature.

To properly comprehend Indian music's characteristics and philosophical underpinnings, it is imperative that the study's historical context be taken into consideration. It is believed that the Vedas are the source of Indian music. God himself is described as having a melodic voice. Over thousands of years, Indian classical music has developed into a profound art form. The spiritual and mythological legacy of India is closely linked to Indian classical music. The heritage of classical music, which frequently combines with old Indian mythology



to produce a profound narrative experience, is a potent storytelling tool due to its exceptional capacity to incite emotions and tell stories.

Hinduism has long placed a high value on the portrayal of music. Classical music may have developed from religious chants and poetry that flourished throughout thousands of years as a result of numerous interactions between various cultures and civilizations. The Sama Veda, one of the four Vedas, is referred to as the musical Veda. With only a few explanations of the various facets of formal music, it is a comprehensive text of composed and noted melodies. The Sama Vedic texts are thought to be the primary source of almost all ancient treaties and musical texts. Sama, which literally translates to "listening to" or "hearing," is one of the earliest genres of music.

INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

Indian classical music is an extensive cultural heritage that originated in South Asia and has since spread around the world. Its origins can be traced back over 6,000 years to the Vedic writings, where chants evolved into a system of musical notes and rhythmic patterns. The history of Indian music can be divided into three primary periods: ancient, medieval, and modern. Ancient music lasted from the Vedic Age to the Sangita Ratnakara period, following which the medieval music system formed. Indian classical music primarily explores the melodic and emotional potential of various ragas. There are around 500 ragas known or known of today (including historical ragas). Ragas can die out if they are no longer performed, however new ragas are constantly created, and some of them survive. Thus, the number of ragas is not predetermined. Students initially learn all of the essential ragas, then devote several years to mastering the ragas of their preference.

Indian classical music is among the earliest forms of art. It has its origins in Hinduism's Vedic literature and the ancient Natyashastra. Indian music is claimed to have originated in the Samaveda. Some believe God is a musical being. The theory of Indian classical music stems from the concept of nadabrahman, the sound that fills the entire cosmos. The genesis of Indian music is thus seen as heavenly in character. It is stated that musicians must adopt a self-embodying mindset in order to unite with the supreme reality, Brahma. Brahma is claimed to have composed the four Vedas, the Samaveda of which was chanted in a melodic pattern. The core character of Indian music has been carefully preserved over the millennia. Indian classical music is made up of two basic elements: raga and Taal. The raga provides the melodic structure of the song, whereas the taal measures the time.

Around the 14th century, it culminated in the division of Indian music into two branches: Hindustani i.e. North Indian and Carnatic i.e. South Indian systems. Both of these branches grew and established themselves firmly. During this time, numerous musicologists and composers were on the scene, enriching the concepts of Raga, Taal, and musical genres. The difference between North Indian Hindustani Classical Music and South Indian Carnatic Classical Music stems from state geography. Carnatic music is based on South Indian languages and is popular in areas such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala. Another significant distinction is that Carnatic Music relies more on vocals. All compositions, even instrumental ones, are meant to be sung. Carnatic Classical Music follows more severe rules than Hindustani Classical Music. One of the best things of India is how diverse cultures and rituals are celebrated here. Carnatic Classical Music is also extremely popular in Southern India.

MYTHOLOGY IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

According to Indian philosophy, the most fundamental truth of sound is the sound of God or God as sound, which is the formless which is called AUM. It represents the sound of Nadabrahman. That is why AUM is regarded as the greatest mantra; it represents God manifesting. God's manifesting emblem is the word of splendour, AUM. The hidden phrase AUM represents the essence of the universe. In the Indian Mythological



idea of nadabrahma, music or nada is regarded as a manifestation of the Brahman. The nadabrahman, or ultimate and transcendental sound, is the germ that gave rise to all of creation.

Furthermore, while analysing the foundation of Indian classical music, it is critical to grasp the concept of *rasa*, which is crucial to classical music's storytelling power. *Rasa* is the emotional essence or flavor that a raga aims to evoke in its listeners. These feelings include love (*shringara*), heroism (*vira*), compassion (*karuna*), and awe (*adbhuta*), among others. Each raga represents a specific time of day, season, or mood, and when performed, it brings the listener to that emotional state. Ragas can inspire a wide range of emotions, which allows musicians to employ them as a storytelling tool. When these emotions are combined with legendary themes—whether divine love, the sadness of separation, or the heroism of a hero—the result is a powerful depiction of these stories through sound.

Bard-priests, such as Mirabai, were major figures in Vedic culture, composing hymns or bhajans in worship of God and reciting them as they travelled from temple to temple. All of the shlokas were passed down from one generation to the next through word of mouth. Later, Bharata Muni codified them in his book 'Natya Sastra', which is a complete collection of technical guidelines for performing arts. The term *Natya* is used in the text to refer to drama, dance, and music in general. The text takes the form of intricate dialogues between the author and a group of sages who want to learn about *Natya-Veda*, or knowledge of the performing arts such as dance, music, and drama. It is the only book that discusses the history of Indian music and various instruments during the Vedic period. Music is known as the fifth Veda, and the ancient musical literature are commonly referred to as *Gandharva Sastra* or *Gandharva Veda*, after the celestial musicians.

Musical instruments are frequently mentioned in Indian mythology, often in association with the celestial beings.

- Goddess Saraswati is regarded as the patron goddess of all arts. She is pictured holding a classical Veena in one of her four hands and is credited with inventing the seven-tone scale, or *swara*. The veena is a stringed instrument whose melodic sound is considered divine. Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom, and learning, is pictured holding a veena, representing the divine connection between art and knowledge.
- Lord Krishna, a manifestation of Vishnu, is famously shown playing the flute. His lovely melodies are supposed to have captivated everyone, especially the gopis (milkmaids) of Vrindavan. Krishna is always pictured carrying a flute and playing beautiful sounds with it.
- The holy trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh is likewise not far behind in terms of music. Vishnu, the universe's preserver, is frequently associated with the conch shell held in one of his four hands, also known as the *shankha* or conch. The sound of the conch is considered sacred and is employed in a variety of religious ceremonies. This *shankha* is claimed to have produced the primordial sound 'Om', which is the source of all other sounds in the universe.
- Shiva's cosmic dance, known as *Nataraja*, the lord of dance, is accompanied by the *damaru*, a tiny drum with two heads that symbolizes the rhythm of creation and destruction. The *mridangam*, referenced in ancient writings, is utilized in religious and cultural activities.
- Narada, the celestial sage and musician, is shown playing the veena. He is well-known for his musical abilities and is sometimes referred to as a wandering musician who uses his songs to preach a message of dedication.
- Ravana, the greatest enemy in Hindu mythology, was renowned for being a multi-talented craftsman. Ravana is frequently seen wielding a Veena in popular iconography. In truth, it is the name of a simple string instrument. This ancient bowed instrument, known as the *Ravanastram*, is made up of a half-

hollowed coconut shell with a dried skin covering the belly and a bamboo stick for the body to which two wooden pegs are attached for tuning the strings. A fiddle stick is a bow with belts and a string of horse hair fastened to it.

- The guardians and practitioners of the arts, particularly dance and music, were the Gandharvas, or celestial musicians, under the leadership of Chitrāsena. In their palaces, they performed exquisite music for the gods and protected the Soma. It is common to see Gandharvas singing in the court of the gods.

MYTHOLOGY IN NORTH INDIAN HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

The tale of Vishnu's humorous yet divine form, Krishna, and his eternal consort, Radha, is one of the most frequently featured subjects in Hindustani music. Their love serves as a metaphor for the desire of the human spirit to become one with the divine. This theme is the subject of numerous khayal and thumri compositions that depict different facets of their relationship, ranging from the happy play of their early love to the sadness of their separation. The raga Khamaj is commonly used to portray emotions of love and separation. The raga's gradual, methodical development reflects Radha's intense feelings, encapsulating both the happiness of reunion and the anguish of longing. In a similar vein, Raga Yaman is frequently utilized to invoke the heavenly love between Krishna and Radha because of its calm and compassionate nature. The music frequently includes lyrics that are directly derived from mythological poetry, such as passages from the Gita Govinda, a work written in the 12th century that describes Krishna's love for Radha.

Arjuna, the Mahabharata's valiant warrior, is another important figure in Indian mythology. The epic's key themes include his bravery and righteousness as well as his internal conflicts over morality and duty. In classical music, ragas that express strength and power encapsulate the spirit of heroism (vira rasa). Raga Bhimpalasi is frequently linked to bravery and tenacity. Even while Arjuna's story isn't often sung directly in songs, characters like him are frequently associated with ragas that inspire sentiments of bravery and adversity. The emotional and moral struggles that a figure like Arjuna faces in his pursuit of justice are reflected in Raga Bhimpalasi's melodic grandeur and rhythmic intensity.

MYTHOLOGY IN SOUTH INDIAN CARNATIC CLASSICAL MUSIC

The use of mythical elements to weave stories is even more prevalent in Carnatic music. Numerous kritis, or compositions, are outright references to or stories about gods and goddesses. A large portion of the extensive repertory of devotional music written by artists such as Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Syama Sastri narrates tales from Hindu mythology. One of the most celebrated Carnatic music composers, Tyagaraja, was a devoted devotee of Lord Rama. His profound commitment is evident in several of his compositions, which are based on Ramayana stories. His kritis are evocative musical depictions of Rama's life and values rather than just devotional hymns.

Another important element in Carnatic music is the worship of goddesses. For instance, compositions frequently portray the goddess Durga as the powerful guardian who defeats evil. Durga's ferocity and maternal tenderness are captured in the raga Shankarabharanam, which is frequently utilized to chant praises of her due to its broad and powerful feel.

On the other hand, more calm and reflective ragas like Raga Hamsadhwani frequently invoke Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and the arts. This raga's upbeat, distinct melodies convey Saraswati's serene disposition and her function as the source of wisdom and inventiveness. The blessings of mastering the arts, particularly music, are frequently invoked in compositions dedicated to her.

NUANCES OF MUSIC IN RAMAYANA AND MAHABHARATA

The sage Valmiki wrote the Ramayana, the first Indian epic. The writing style used was shloka. The term "shloka" describes a certain type of metrical writing that is characterized by its melodic rhyme, easy speed,



and conciseness. The epic's extravagant use of musical metaphors makes it clear that the idea of music, or sangeet, had been sufficiently developed and understood. Terminologies such as Gandharva, the 'classical' music of the era, and Marga sangeet, celestial music reserved for the gods, are mentioned. In the Ramayana, Ravana and Sugreeva were also portrayed as masters of gandharva. The Veena, Venu, Vansha, Shankha, Dundubhi, Bheri, Mridang, Panav, and Pataha are among the musical instruments that were collectively referred to as atodya in the epic. Vyasa's Mahabharata, which has 24000 shlokas, mentions music frequently, but not as much as the Ramayana. In the Mahabharata, the name Gandharva was used instead of Sangeet. Arjuna, one of the Mahabharata's heroes, learned these musical skills from the monarch of Gandharvas, Chitrashen. There are also allusions to kings running their own music schools to teach princesses and maids-in-waiting about the performing arts. The names of the seven basic musical notes (shadja) are clearly mentioned in the Mahabharata, written circa 400 BC. The epic therefore exemplifies the long-standing legacy of Indian classical music.

CONCLUSION

The realization of music's eternal soul serves as the firm intellectual underpinning for Indian music. One of the world's longest continuous musical traditions is that of India. In India, music served a more profound purpose and had a deeper meaning than mere sensual pleasure or a luxury enjoyed by the ruling class. Indian musicians used their musical compositions and performances to convey philosophical and religious ideas. By focusing on God's beauty, they sought to bring the God who is seen as the source of wisdom, strength, and understanding closer to us. The three value systems of satyam, sivam, and sundaram are realized by man through sadana, or practice; sravana, or education; and manana, or experience. Thus, music and philosophy go hand in hand in India. Indian music has been able to outperform all outside influences while simultaneously maintaining its vibrant moral code. The distinctive aesthetic understanding, close connection to religious ideas, and omnipresent spirituality of Indian music set it apart from music from other regions of the world.

Mythology has had a significant and far-reaching impact on Indian music. From Vedic antiquity to the present, songs about gods have been fundamental to Indian music. Whether naming ragas or inventing musical instruments, Hindus have traditionally drawn inspiration from mythological creatures. We not only tell but also sing stories about our gods and heroes, because music is the manifestation of divinity. Indian classical music, with its intensely emotive ragas and passionate performances, is especially suited to telling stories from ancient mythology. Whether through devotional compositions, improvisational raga renditions, or rhythmic tales, these stories are brought to life in a way that deeply connects with listeners. These ties underline the intimate relationship between music and spirituality in Indian culture, where musical instruments are treasured as holy symbols in addition to being used to create tunes. Music is important in Hindu mythology because it is frequently used as a divine channel to connect the earthly and spiritual worlds.

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