

A BRIEF STUDY OF THE CHRONOLOGICAL DIFFRACTION OF FLUTE BEFORE AND AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

The flute, one of the most ancient and culturally rich instruments in the world, holds a unique place in Indian music. From its mythological association with Lord Krishna to its evolution into a classical instrument in modern India, the flute's journey reflects the socio-cultural and artistic transitions of Indian music. This study traces the historical origins of the flute from tribal bamboo sound-making to its sophisticated use in Indian classical music. It focuses particularly on the transformative role played by pioneers like Pannalal Ghosh and Hariprasad Chaurasia in elevating the flute from folk traditions to a central position in Indian art music. By exploring the instrument's early forms, its migration through cultures, and its refinement in modern times, this research provides insight into how indigenous instruments adapt, survive, and flourish across generations.

Key Words: - Music, Indian Classical Music, Folk Music, Pre Independence, Post Independence

Introduction

Among all musical instruments native to India, the flute (Bansuri) occupies a sacred and emotional position. Its origin can be traced back to the Vedic period, where it was praised in scriptures and associated with divine music. Perhaps most famously, it is linked with Lord Krishna, whose flute-playing is said to have captivated entire villages, symbolizing love, unity, and divine joy. The earliest forms of the flute were made from natural materials such as bamboo, bone, and wood, often used by tribal communities for ritualistic and entertainment purposes. Its simplicity and portability made it accessible to people of all classes. Over centuries, its structure and musical range evolved to meet the expressive demands of Indian classical music. The transition from folk to classical was significantly advanced by Pannalal Ghosh, who reimagined the flute both structurally and musically. His innovations enabled the instrument to enter the mainstream classical tradition. This paper explores the historical development, cultural transitions, and key figures in the journey of the flute in India. It particularly emphasizes how the instrument was reconstructed and recontextualized post-independence, leading to a new era of recognition and respect for the flute as a classical instrument.

Methodology

This study employs a historical-analytical approach, using available textual sources, biographies, and oral traditions to trace the development of the flute in Indian music. The following key strategies were adopted: 1. Literature Review: Sources including ancient epics, the Vedas, Buddhist scriptures (Tripitaka), and archaeological evidence from Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were studied to map the flute's early presence. 2. Cultural Analysis: The flute's association with tribal and folk traditions was examined to understand its grassroots origins. 3. Artist-Centric Inquiry: The contributions of seminal figures such as Pannalal Ghosh, Hariprasad Chaurasia, and Rakesh Chaurasia were analyzed to understand how individual agency played a role in shaping the instrument's classical trajectory. 4. Comparative Study: Evolution of the flute in India was briefly compared to its parallel development in other cultures (e.g., China), where similar instruments like the Chiee emerged. This multi-pronged method allowed for a nuanced understanding of the flute's transformation from a pastoral folk instrument to a globally recognized symbol of Indian classical music.

Main Study

Ancient Roots and Mythological Significance

The origin of flute dates back to the ancient times. Among the Indian musical instruments, it has its own place. The epics describe, Lord Krishna was the master of it, whole of village used to gather just to enjoy the magical touch of the flute. The world used to get captivated by the wave of music emanated from the flute of the genius Lord Krishna himself. The Vedas describe it as the oldest song-based musical instruments. Even in the 2000 years old Buddhist epic Tripitakan, it finds its mention. When analyzed in true sense, men have associated themselves with the flute even before the origin. When men came on earth, find their dwelling in forest, where they used to extract music from the sound of bamboo trees and thereby came the origin of "Flute" (Banshi). That was the very reason which associates it to tribal folk songs, which can be traced back from 900 B.C. It is believed to be originating from China where it was known as "Chiee". Even during the excavation in Harappa and Mohenjodaro,

many waste materials and some musical instruments were found. Among those things, there were flute made up of bones as Claimed by experts.

Status of Flute Before Independence

From the year 1100 to 1200 the beauty of flute spread across the royal empires. It was used widely during the military marching. After 1500AD it was wide spread across the globe. Before freedom, the flute gained a unique identity among the folk. The ancient tribal were skilled enough to manufacture different types of flutes. It was made up of soil, metal, bamboo, wood etc. among all the bamboo made flute was more pleasing to the ear. This was made up of a single strand of bamboo where a mouth piece and five side ward holes were there. These flutes did not have any fixed musical words such as (Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni). As it did not confine to a trained or skilled person so, it got wide fame from township to rural area. 1911 was the year when the famous guru Pannalal Ghosh was born in the Varishal village in Bangladesh. He was the man who had profound knowledge and mastery on how the constructivist approach can be used to excel in flute playing. In 1928, when he was 17, he was the member of the group whose was to not to partition Bengal. Along with being a musician he was a skilled wrestler and a boxer. He was also interested and proactively participated to fight against the britishers. And this resulted adversely for him as the britishers acted against him. After that he leaving the place got settled in Calcutta, where he established his musical journey. Due to high inclination towards the flute, he had adopted it completely. He also got mesmerized after hearing the classical music, Sitar, Sarod from the expert musician in Calcutta. At that time flute was folk music which was often played by local tribal in villages.

Post-Independence Growth and Global Recognition

Post independence it was given importance on how to include flute to enhance classical music. And the bamboo-made flute remained the first choice to be incorporated in classical music. A 32 inches length flute made up of bamboo was developed. There were 7 hole in this, where one main hole and 6 auxiliary holes were included. In this the vocal holes were kept at distance. "Bihag, Yaman, Bageshri, Darbari" were the few singings style that were associated with the flute. Pannalal Ghosh was the one who can give credits to spread its music through the Indian Radio. He was also praised highly by playing flute on foreign countries like France, England and Germany etc. Later he died in heart attack in 1960 but till then he had made so many students who credit him as their teacher. After his death his legacy has been carried forward by Hariprasad Chourasia, Debendra Murdheswar, Pt. Raghunath Seth, Nityananda Haldipur. Except from these Hariprasad Chaurasia came to fame with his extraordinary skill. He could captivate the heart of all the listeners. He had his unique style. He was the face of change for good of flute in acclaimed flute player. He had also taken the legacy of flute to foreign countries. Along with all of them Pt. Rakesh Chaurasia brought flute playing incorporated with classical music to high level. He has also tried to modernize the flute and created interest among the youth. And all these paved the way for the development of flute and its legacy.

Conclusion

The flute's journey in India is one of organic growth, spiritual resonance, and cultural adaptation. What began as a simple bamboo pipe in tribal forests has evolved into a sophisticated classical instrument, capable of expressing complex ragas and emotions. This transformation was not accidental—it was driven by passionate individuals who envisioned more for the flute, particularly Pannalal Ghosh, who modified its physical structure to meet classical standards, and Hariprasad Chaurasia, who elevated its aesthetic appeal globally. Today, the flute is not only a link to India's pastoral and divine past but also a living instrument of innovation and expression. Its legacy continues to inspire newer generations, showing how tradition and modernity can harmoniously coexist through music. The story of the flute exemplifies how an instrument rooted in the soil can ascend to global reverence so long as it remains in the hands of those who truly listen.

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