

Indian Classical Music

Indian classical music is an intricate and profound tradition, deeply embedded in India's cultural heritage. It is broadly divided into two major traditions: Hindustani (North Indian) and Carnatic (South Indian). This chapter focuses on Hindustani music, exploring its fundamental elements, including ragas, talas, and notable composers and styles.

Hindustani Music

1. Ragas and Talas

a. Ragas:

- **Definition:** A raga is a melodic framework for improvisation and composition in Indian classical music. It consists of a specific set of notes arranged in a particular manner to evoke a range of emotions or moods.
- **Components:**
 - **Arohana and Avarohana:** These are the ascending (Arohana) and descending (Avarohana) scales of a raga. They determine the sequence of notes used in the raga.
 - **Vadi and Samvadi:** The Vadi (principal) and Samvadi (secondary) notes are the most emphasized notes in a raga. They play a key role in defining the raga's character.
 - **Pakad:** This refers to the characteristic phrases or motifs of a raga that make it recognizable.
- **Examples of Ragas:**
 - **Raga Yaman:** Performed in the evening, Raga Yaman is known for its serene and meditative quality. It uses a specific set of notes and is associated with devotion and tranquility.
 - **Raga Bhimpalasi:** This raga is associated with the late afternoon and is known for expressing longing and devotion. Its notes create a mood of romance and emotional depth.

b. Talas:

- **Definition:** A tala is a rhythmic cycle used in Indian classical music that organizes beats into a repeating pattern. It provides the rhythmic structure for a performance.
- **Components:**
 - **Matras:** The individual beats within a tala.
 - **Vibhags:** The divisions within a tala, grouping matras into specific patterns.
 - **Laya:** The tempo of the tala, which can be fast (Drut), medium (Madhya), or slow (Vilambit).
- **Examples of Talas:**
 - **Teentaal:** A 16-beat tala divided into four vibhags of four beats each. It is widely used in Hindustani music and provides a rhythmic foundation for many compositions.
 - **Ektaal:** A 12-beat tala divided into six vibhags of two beats each. It is commonly used in dhrupad and khayal compositions.



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2. Prominent Composers and Styles

a. Prominent Composers:

- **Tansen (1500-1589):** A legendary figure in Hindustani music, Tansen was a court musician in the Mughal Empire. He is renowned for his innovations in ragas and his contributions to the Dhrupad style. His compositions and techniques have left a lasting legacy in Indian classical music.
- **Bhatkhande (1860-1936):** A musicologist and composer who played a crucial role in systematizing Hindustani classical music. His work, including the "Kramik Pustak Malika," provided a comprehensive framework for understanding ragas, talas, and compositions.
- **Ameer Khusro (1253-1325):** A prominent poet and musician whose compositions influenced the development of Hindustani music. He is known for his contributions to the Khayal style and his creation of new ragas and compositions.

b. Musical Styles:

- **Dhrupad:**
 - **Characteristics:** Dhrupad is one of the oldest forms of Hindustani music, known for its serious and meditative quality. It emphasizes the purity of raga and tala, with a focus on intricate melodic and rhythmic patterns.
 - **Performance:** Dhrupad performances involve a slow, deliberate exposition of the raga, often accompanied by minimal instrumental support. The style features elaborate improvisations and a deep exploration of the raga's emotional and spiritual aspects.
- **Khayal:**
 - **Characteristics:** The Khayal style emerged later and is characterized by its flexibility and emphasis on improvisation. It allows for more expressive and spontaneous performance compared to Dhrupad.
 - **Performance:** Khayal performances feature intricate improvisations and ornamentations, with a focus on dynamic interaction between the vocalist and instrumentalists. The style includes faster tempos and a wide range of expressive techniques.
- **Thumri:**
 - **Characteristics:** Thumri is a lighter and more lyrical form of Hindustani music, often focusing on romantic and devotional themes. It is known for its emotive and expressive qualities.
 - **Performance:** Thumri performances involve intricate and emotive singing, with an emphasis on conveying emotions and sentiments. The style often includes playful and romantic elements, using a more relaxed rhythmic structure.

Indian Classical Dance



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Indian classical dance forms are deeply intertwined with the country's cultural and artistic traditions. Each classical dance style has its unique characteristics, but they share a common foundation in the principles of Indian music, including the use of ragas and talas.

1. Indian Classical Dance Forms:

- **Kathak:** Originating from North India, Kathak is characterized by its intricate footwork, expressive gestures, and storytelling through dance. It often features elements of both devotional and narrative themes.
- **Bharatanatyam:** Hailing from Tamil Nadu, Bharatanatyam is known for its grace, precise movements, and elaborate expressions. It combines dance with dramatic storytelling and religious themes.
- **Kathakali:** A traditional dance-drama from Kerala, Kathakali is famous for its elaborate costumes, makeup, and dramatic storytelling. It combines dance, music, and acting to narrate mythological and historical tales.
- **Odissi:** Originating from Odisha, Odissi is distinguished by its sculptural poses, fluid movements, and emphasis on devotional themes. It often depicts stories from Hindu mythology and showcases intricate footwork and hand gestures.
- **Manipuri:** From the state of Manipur, Manipuri dance is known for its graceful, rhythmic movements and its focus on themes of love and devotion. It often features a combination of dance and song in a devotional context.

2. Connection to Hindustani Music:

- **Musical Accompaniment:** Indian classical dance forms often use Hindustani music as an accompaniment, incorporating ragas and talas into their performances. The interplay between music and dance enhances the overall artistic expression and provides a rhythmic and melodic foundation.
- **Improvisation and Expression:** Just as Hindustani music emphasizes improvisation and emotional expression, classical dance forms incorporate these elements into their performances. Dancers interpret ragas and talas through their movements and expressions, creating a dynamic and immersive experience for the audience.

Indian classical music and dance are integral components of India's cultural heritage, with Hindustani music providing the melodic and rhythmic foundations for many classical dance forms. The exploration of ragas, talas, and prominent composers highlights the depth and complexity of Hindustani music, while the various classical dance styles demonstrate the rich artistic traditions that continue to thrive in India. Together, these art forms represent a vibrant and evolving cultural legacy that continues to captivate and inspire audiences around the world.

Carnatic Music

Carnatic music is a classical tradition from South India, characterized by its intricate compositions and emphasis on melodic improvisation. It is distinct from Hindustani music but shares some common elements with it, such as the use of ragas and talas. This section focuses on key aspects of Carnatic music, including its major forms and notable composers.



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Kriti and Varnam Forms

1. Kriti:

- **Definition:** The Kriti is a central form of composition in Carnatic music, known for its lyrical and structured format. It serves as the cornerstone of many Carnatic music performances.
- **Structure:** A typical Kriti consists of several sections:
 - **Pallavi:** The introductory line or refrain, often repeated throughout the piece. It introduces the main theme of the composition.
 - **Anupallavi:** The second section that expands on the theme introduced in the Pallavi, often with a different melodic and rhythmic pattern.
 - **Charanam:** The concluding section that provides the main body of the composition, offering further elaboration and development of the theme.
- **Examples:** Kritis are composed in various ragas and talas, and they can vary in length and complexity. They are performed with intricate melodic and rhythmic embellishments.

2. Varnam:

- **Definition:** The Varnam is a significant form in Carnatic music, often used as a warm-up piece at the beginning of a concert. It serves both as a musical exercise and as a performance piece.
- **Structure:** Varnams typically consist of two main sections:
 - **Pallavi:** The first part, introducing the main theme with repetitive phrases to establish the raga and tala.
 - **Charanam:** The second part, offering more elaborate and complex patterns that showcase the performer's technical prowess and improvisational skills.
- **Purpose:** Varnams are used to explore the raga in depth and to prepare both the performer and the audience for more complex compositions. They are characterized by their rhythmic complexity and melodic richness.

Famous Composers

1. Thyagaraja (1767-1847):

- **Overview:** Thyagaraja is one of the most revered composers in Carnatic music. His compositions, known for their devotional and lyrical quality, form a significant part of the Carnatic repertoire.
- **Contributions:**
 - **Kritis:** Thyagaraja composed over 700 Kritis, many of which are dedicated to Lord Rama. His compositions are celebrated for their poetic depth and musical sophistication.
 - **Style:** His music is characterized by its intricate melodic structure and expressive lyrics, often reflecting themes of devotion, love, and spirituality.
- **Famous Compositions:** Some of his well-known Kritis include "Endaro Mahanubhavulu," "Jagadananda Karaka," and "Sogasu Chooda Tharamaa."



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2. Muthuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835):

- Muthuswami Dikshitar was a prolific composer and a key figure in the Carnatic tradition. His compositions are known for their scholarly approach and incorporation of diverse musical elements.
- **Contributions:**
 - **Kritis:** Dikshitar's Kritis are notable for their complex melodic structures and incorporation of Sanskrit lyrics. His compositions often include elements from various Indian musical traditions.
 - **Style:** His music is distinguished by its intricate ragas and talas, as well as its incorporation of theoretical and philosophical themes.
- **Famous Compositions:** Some of his renowned works include "Vatapi Ganapatim," "Kamakshi," and "Maha Ganapatim."

Carnatic music, with its rich tradition of Kriti and Varnam forms, offers a deep and expressive musical experience. The contributions of composers like Thyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar have profoundly shaped the Carnatic repertoire, leaving a lasting legacy that continues to inspire and captivate audiences. Their compositions exemplify the intricate beauty and devotional essence of Carnatic music, showcasing the genre's melodic and rhythmic complexity.

Instruments and Styles in Indian Classical Music

Indian classical music features a diverse array of instruments, each contributing uniquely to the musical tradition. Among these, the Sitar, Tabla, and Veena are prominent, each with its distinctive role and style. Understanding the evolution of these instruments provides insight into their current forms and their impact on Indian classical music.

Sitar

- **Definition:** The Sitar is a plucked string instrument known for its resonant and rich sound. It is a key instrument in Hindustani (North Indian) classical music.
- **Structure:** The Sitar typically has a long neck with 18-21 strings, including both melody strings (playing the main tune) and sympathetic strings (resonating to enhance the tonal quality). It also features a gourd-shaped resonator that amplifies the sound.

2. Playing Style:

- **Technique:** The Sitar is played with a plectrum called a "mizrab," which is used to pluck the strings. The player uses intricate finger movements and various techniques such as "meend" (glides), "gamak" (ornamentation), and "taan" (fast melodic phrases) to produce expressive sounds.
- **Performance:** The Sitar is often used in both solo performances and as an accompaniment in instrumental ensembles and vocal music. It plays a central role in the development of ragas and is known for its ability to convey complex emotions.

3. Evolution:



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- **Origins:** The Sitar's origins are debated, but it is believed to have evolved from earlier Persian and Central Asian instruments such as the "setar" and "dotar." It was adapted in India during the Mughal period.
- **Development:** Over time, the Sitar underwent significant modifications in its design and construction. The addition of sympathetic strings and changes in the resonator shape contributed to its distinctive sound.

Tabla

- **Definition:** The Tabla is a pair of hand-played drums widely used in Hindustani classical music. It consists of a smaller drum called the "dayan" (right-hand drum) and a larger drum called the "bayan" (left-hand drum).
- **Structure:** The Tabla drums are made of wood and metal, with the dayan featuring a single head and the bayan having a larger, deeper drum with a resonant body. The heads are tuned using adjustable rings and are played with the fingers and palms.

2. Playing Style:

- **Technique:** Tabla players use a range of strokes known as "bols" to produce different sounds and rhythms. The techniques involve finger taps, slaps, and open strokes that create intricate rhythmic patterns.
- **Performance:** The Tabla is essential for accompanying vocal music, instrumental performances, and dance. It plays a central role in providing rhythmic support and enhancing the overall musical experience.

3. Evolution:

- **Origins:** The Tabla's origins are not entirely clear, but it is believed to have developed in India from earlier percussion instruments like the "pakhawaj" and "mridangam." It gained prominence during the Mughal period.
- **Development:** The Tabla evolved in its construction and playing techniques over the centuries, with significant contributions from various schools of playing and prominent musicians who refined its techniques.

Veena

- **Definition:** The Veena is a traditional plucked string instrument used in Carnatic (South Indian) classical music. It is known for its resonant and melodic sound.
- **Structure:** The Veena typically has a large, hollow wooden resonator, a long neck with frets, and several strings. The instrument has a rich, deep tone and is played by plucking the strings with the fingers.

2. Playing Style:



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- **Technique:** The Veena is played using the fingers to pluck the strings while pressing down on the frets to produce different notes. Techniques include "kattai" (plucking), "gamak" (ornamentation), and "briga" (fast melodic phrases).
- **Performance:** The Veena is used in both solo performances and as an accompaniment to vocal music and dance. It is known for its capacity to explore ragas with subtlety and depth.

3. Evolution:

- **Origins:** The Veena has ancient origins, with references to similar instruments found in early Hindu texts and sculptures. It is believed to have evolved from earlier string instruments used in South India.
- **Development:** The Veena underwent various changes in its design and construction over the centuries. Different regional styles and schools of playing contributed to the evolution of its sound and technique.

Evolution of Instruments

1. Historical Development:

- **Early Instruments:** Many Indian classical instruments have ancient origins, with early references found in Vedic texts and sculptures. Instruments such as the Veena and various percussion instruments were used in temple rituals and classical performances.
- **Medieval Period:** During the medieval period, instruments like the Sitar and Tabla were developed and refined, influenced by Persian and Central Asian musical traditions. The Mughal period saw significant changes in the construction and playing techniques of these instruments.

2. Modern Adaptations:

- **Contemporary Changes:** In modern times, traditional instruments have been adapted to suit contemporary musical styles and performance practices. For example, the Sitar has been modified for use in fusion and global music genres, and the Tabla has seen innovations in drumhead materials and tuning techniques.
- **Technology:** The introduction of electronic amplifiers and pickups has expanded the range and versatility of traditional instruments, allowing them to be used in diverse musical settings and recordings.

The Sitar, Tabla, and Veena are integral to Indian classical music, each contributing its unique sound and style. Their evolution reflects the rich history and ongoing innovation in Indian music. Understanding these instruments' historical development and contemporary adaptations provides insight into their role in preserving and advancing India's musical heritage.

