UNIT 1  BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIAN MUSIC

Structure

1.1 Introduction

Objectives

1.2 Music and its Origin

1.3 Concept of Music

1.4 Vedic Period

1.5 Summary

1.6 Self Assessment Questions

1.7 True or False Questions

1.8 Terminal Questions

1.9 Answers

1.1 INTRODUCTION

From the dawn of human history, man realized that he was dependent upon a superhuman power and he established his relationship with God. In order to define his attitude towards the superior power, he chose the medium of music. He firmly believed that the intoned word called ‘mantra’ was more effective than plain spoken words and the Vedas are the best example of this. The association of the Vedas with music can be considered as the beginning of progress in the direction of music.

Objectives

After studying this block you should be able to:

a) realize the purity of music in ancient times.

b) understand the relation of music with the universe.

c) know the basic concepts of Hindustani music.

1.2 MUSIC AND ITS ORIGIN

Music plays an important role in the religious, social and artistic lives of human beings. It is an integral part of man’s life. Music is as old in the history of civilisation as human speech. It existed even before human existence. It is a spontaneous outcome of the basic human emotions in a melodious manner. All that which mere words fail to convey, music successfully and convincingly conveys.

Music in its definition is a phenomenon which is as vast as the Universe. Nature depicts itself through music. We find various sounds in Nature that are musical. The falling of rain, the waves of the ocean, the sweet chirping of birds are the fine examples of the universal rhythm. All these spell music. Nature is the fountain source of all music. Primitive man realised that the various sounds that fill the nature are musical before he realized the fact that even his body could be a musical instrument. So slowly, as the human race evolved and progressed, man learnt to imitate or reproduce, in a modest way, the sounds around him. He either used his own vocal chords - his voice - for this purpose or
made use of the natural things round him to create instruments which he gradually came to use for a variety of purposes. All the primitive instruments eventually were improved upon over long periods to result in today’s sophisticated drums, strings and wind instruments; but the ideas and fundamentals remain the same over the millennia.

### 1.3 Concept of Music

Sangeet is used for the combination of three arts — vocal music, instrumental music and dance. The cultural conditions in India remained important determinants in shaping its music. Music being a performing art, is an indispensable part of the life of the Indians. It binds all the diverse elements like social, cultural, patriotic and religious ethos into one solid mass.

Music existed even before the birth of human beings. Man has always chosen music as a medium to communicate with God. Music can create spell even without words. It is a powerful medium to convey feelings like joy, love, hate, sorrow, victory, hope, defeat etc. These are universal feelings which are felt in the same way in every human heart. Man is a creature of these universal feelings and thus becomes a part of the music that expresses them.

### 1.4 Vedic Period

The earliest chanting was the Rig Vedic hymns (3000 B.C. to 1500 B.C.). The scientist art form of today’s music has its birth in the Vedic period only. The literary and music traditions start from this period. Hindu tradition says that the text of the four Vedas namely Rig, Saama, Yaj, Artharva were imparted to the sages by God Brahma, the creator of the universe in the form of spoken words and have been handed down from generation to generation in oral tradition. The Vedic scholars enjoyed reciting spiritual verse of the Vedas in groups which required a disciplined way of chanting.

The sacred sound “Om” was considered as the basic note of music. The Saama–Veda was mainly connected with Soma sacrifices and Somayaaga. The verses of the Saama – Veda served the purpose of musical notes.

The musical notes emerged from the accents employed to sing the hymns. The Saama Saptaka was in the descending order, this primodial scale is the starting point of the evaluation of the musical scales. In fact, the transition from chanting to singing was a slow process. The intervals of the saama notes were tuned to suit singing.

The beginning of Indian musicography is traced to Vedic chants which used certain symbols to note the rise and fall of the voice during the chant. Measuring the rhythm with finger count in Indian music and Western Staff notation must have originated from Saama hasta. It is surprising to note that it was only in the tenth century A.D. that the “Musical” hand was used by Guido d’Arezzo for the first time in the west.

The origin of musical composition is traced to the Saama Vedic chant. The syllables which did not carry any meaning called Stobha must have given the idea of vowel extensions in songs, rhythmic syllabus. The idea of improvisation and elaboration phrase of music must have come from the Saama Veda itself.

The emergence of the solfa terms is said to be that, Sa and Ma are taken from Saama Veda, Ri, Ga from Rig Veda, Pa, Ni, Dha from Upanishads. The concept of Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni as the solfa syllables is considered as an important and major turning point in the history of music in the Post Vedic Period and these Sapta Svaras are mentioned in the Narada Parivrajaka Upanishadas. These syllables made the music
writing an easy task with the use of symbols. The Solfa names with vowel changes are found in the seventh century Kudumiyanmalai inscription. The European solfa syllables Do, Ri, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti were introduced only in the tenth century by Guido d’Arezzo. By the time of Sankaracharya in the 8th century A.D. the saptasvaras were popular and Shankaracharya himself has written in his Shyaamallaa Navaratna shloka as “Sarigamapadha niratam tam vinasankranta hastam”. Another important reference is found in the sixteenth century work Kala Purnodaya of Pingali Surana. The creative music called manodharma sangita was possible because of the emergence of seven solfa syllables. This scientific melodic development is of great importance in the growth of the art of music.

1.5 SUMMARY

It is a matter of common knowledge to all music lovers that Indian classical music has its origin in the Saama Veda. Saama Veda is the selected collection of hymns from Rig Veda. The rules for chanting the Vedas are laid down in Saama Sootra. Fourteen kinds of poetical metres were used in chanting the Vedas. The actual form of Vedic music is now untraceable.

1.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions

1. Fill in the blank spaces with the appropriate words given below:

(song, sanskrit, vocal, vedic, Samveda, instrumental, nada, dance)

a) The ancient Vedas were written in ____________.
b) The literary and music traditions starts from ____________ period.
c) Sangeet, is used for the three-fold arts of ____________ music, ____________ music and ____________.
d) The sacred sound ____________ was considered as the basic note of music.
e) According to the solfa terms, Sa and Ma are taken from ____________.

1.7 TRUE OR FALSE QUESTIONS

2. According to Hindu religion there are five Vedas.
3. Samveda is related to music.
4. Sama saptaka was in descending order.
5. Music existed even before the birth of humans.

1.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain the relation of music with nature in brief.
2. Write a short note on samveda.
3. Music is an expression of human emotions. Write a short note about it.
1.9 ANSWERS

1. a) Sanskrit
   b) vedic
   c) vocal, instrumental, dance
   d) om
   e) Samveda


Terminal Questions

1. It is obvious that music is as old in the history of civilisation as human speech. It is a spontaneous outburst of the basic human emotions in a melodious manner. Nature is the fountain source of all music. It existed even before human existence. The buzzing bee, the waves of ocean, the whistling wind, the roaring sea, the chirping birds – are some of the organs in nature's glorious symphony.

2. The Saama- Veda was mainly connected with Soma sacrifices and Somayaaga. The verses of the Saama-Veda served the purpose of musical notes. The musical notes emerged from the accents employed to sing the hymns. The Sama Saptaka was in the descending order, this primodial scale is the starting point of the evolution of the musical scales. The idea of improvisation and elaboration phrase of music must have come from the Saama Veda itself.

3. Man has always chosen music as a medium to communicate with God. Music is also a powerful medium to convey universal feelings like love, sorrow, victory, hope, anger etc. Man is a creature of these universal feelings and thus becomes a part of the music that expresses them.