UNIT 1 BRIEF HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF INDIAN MUSIC

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Today everyone in our country knows that there are two distinct types of music which are popular – one is the Hindustani and the other is Karnatak (more popularly called the south Indian music). Many a times, if you are from the north of India, you would fail to understand or appreciate Karnatak music. The southerners are slightly better off since they are well acquainted with the Hindi film music – at least from the golden era of 1950s to 1980s when the base was definitely classical. And then a versatile singer like Lata Mangeshkar – fondly called the nightingale of India-has transcended the geographical and linguistic barriers and has truly united the entire country musically. These two mainstreams are what we call the classical streams. There are also a large number of folk idioms pertaining to the different areas of this vast country. Another unifying factor is the different dance styles which have now gone outside their birth places and have travelled all over the country and the world. Bharata Natyam, though from Tamil Nadu, has truly become a national dance. In almost all the corners of India one can find Bharata Natyam institutes and performances. Similarly now Kathak is being highly appreciated in the southern states. Bharata Natyam is based entirely on the classical Karnatak music and Kathak on Hindustani.

In our tradition dance cannot be even thought of without music. In fact the confluence of music and dance, irrevocably tied together by the taala etched out by the drum creates an almost divine atmosphere. Thus, in order to experience this exquisite confluence, it is desirable to understand the music as a whole of our country.

The same cannot be said about drama which, since it relies entirely on the spoken word, remains regional in its outreach.

Now did you know that for a long while, there was only one musical system in our country? As is with any art flourishing in a dynamic society, music has also undergone
many changes due to development. With the coming of the Muslims to our country we came under the influence of the cultural trends that they brought with them. Of a special mention is the Persian influence on our music. It is this influence that gave rise to the Hindustani music while the Karnatak music remained more or less untouched since the Muslim invasion did not reach the south as forcefully as in the north.

Yet both the systems have similarities due to the common origins that they share.

As students of Art it is essential that you learn to appreciate and understand Indian music which is our greatest inheritance Enjoyment of music is the birth right of every human being. Why loose that right just because you feel alienated from a particular system since intricacies have not been brought to your notice?

Let us demystify Indian music as a whole and dwelve deep into that ocean of exquisite beauty.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you should be able to:

• Realise that essentially and basically there is only one “Music” in our country;
• Understand the basics of both the Karnatak and Hindustani styles; and
• Appreciate the tremendous importance of music in our lives.

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EVOLUTION OF MUSIC IN INDIA

From the dawn of human history, man realized that he was dependent upon a superhuman power and 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. The presentation of intoned words can be considered as the beginning of vocal music.

The earliest chanting was the Rigvedic hymns (3000 B.C. to 1500 B.C.). The scientific art form of music of today took its birth in the Vedic period only. The literary and music tradition starts from this period. Hindu tradition says that the text of the four Vedas namely Rig, Saama, Yajur, Atharva 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 verses 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 Saaman Saptaka was in the ascending order, this primodial scale is the starting point of the evolution of the musical scales. In fact the transition from chanting to singing was a slow process. The intervals of the Saaman 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 counts 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 syllables. The idea of improvisation and elaboration of a particular 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 *Upnishads*. 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 Upanishad. 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 Kudumiya-malai 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 Shyaamalaa 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.

### 1.4 SHIKSHAA LITERATURE

The *Shikshaa* literature plays an important role in defining the highly developed form of music. The most important *Shikshaa* are the *Naradi Shikshaa*, *Panini Shikshaa* and the *Yagnavalkya Shikshaa* which provide abundant information regarding the origin of *svaras, vedic svaras, svaras of laukika gaana* – the secular music. The Aranyakas and Upanishads practiced meditation on the Vinaa. The human body created by God was called as *Deiva Vinaa* and the man made *Vinaa* was called as *Maanushi Vinaa*.

### 1.5 PURAANIC PERIOD

Next appears the *Puraanic* period where music became both devotional and secular in character. A distinctive improvement upon the vedic music was evident. The *Puraananas* were supposed to have been composed by the sage Vyasa. Almost all the *Mahaapuraananas* and *Upapuraananas* contain plenty of material and references to the arts of music and dance. The most important Puraananas is the *Vaaayu Puraana* since it deals with technical aspects of music like *graamas, murchanaas, taanas, alankaaras, varnas* etc.

### 1.6 EPIC PERIOD

The next important period falls under the Epic Age. The great epic *Ramayana* of sage Valmiki in Sanskrit language is a poem set to music which is the oldest next to Saama Veda. The art and the science of music had attained high standard during this period. The fact that Lava and Kusha, sons of King Rama, sang together in unison proves verses were set to particular melodies and rhythmic patterns. The musical composition was called by the name *Geetee*. Music and dancing enjoyed a prominent place in the life of common people. Valmiki had a definite idea of aesthetic
appeal of musical compositions: a composition was expected to sound pleasant and sweet, whether it was recited or sung, capable of arousing the recognised sentiments, at least one or two out of the rasas, and should be sung in three speeds along with the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.

1.7 CONTRIBUTIONS OF BHARATA AND MATANGA

Indian music has had a continuous development from the dawn of history in the spheres of practice and science. The art of music never remained static; especially the classical form always welcomed new theories, new concepts, and new methods of practice but only within the prescribed framework and never crossed the boundary line. Indian music even accommodated the foreign traits which were imbibed in the system without disturbing the basic indigenous features. The development passed through several stages during its long history. The contribution of the practitioners and theoreticians is of great value. The ancient theoreticians were experts not only in the theoretical aspects but also in practical aspects in addition to the twin arts of music and dance. The ancient literary works on naatya treated dance as the main subject and a marginal treatment was allotted to music. In the medieval works the naatya was treated as the combination of geeta-music-vocal; vaadya-instrumental music-nritya-dance. The modern literature gave prominence to geeta-music and devoted only few chapters to dance.

History of music can be studied under the categories of: chronological survey of different periods, development in those particular periods in all aspects; study of the Lakshanagranthas which provide the theoretical aspects; analysing the musical compositions, composers’ contribution; and the contribution of the teachers and their disciples.

The ancient comprises pre-historic period down to the period of Matanga, the author of the Sanskrit work named Brihaddeshi. This period witnessed the invaluable contribution of Bharata Muni who authored the great treatise Natyashastra in Sanskrit which has made him the first and foremost on Dramaturgy. Actually there is no knowledge, no craft, no technique, no activity which is not found in the Natyashastra.

Many treatises have been inspired and influenced by the Natya Shastra over the centuries. Bharata’s music was associated with theatrical performance. Melodies were derived from the modes jaatis which have been derived from the hepta tonic progressions named murchhanaas.

By this time the concept of Vaadi, Samvaadi, Vivaadi and Anuvaadi became clear. Vaadi is the dominant note in a musical phrase or a melody. Vaadi-note is compared to a king in the melody; Samvaadi is a note having harmonious relationship with the note Vaadi or the tonic note. Vivaadi is a dissonant note which creates a discordant effect, an enemy of the melody. Anuvaadi is an assonant note subordinate in nature like a servant.

Bharata explained the relationship of svaras and jaatis. He also explained the rasas—sentiments—emanating from the sapta svaaras as well as jaatis. He gives a detailed account of Aarohi, Avarohi, Sthaayi and Sanchaari. Aarohi is the ascending of phrase of notes, Avarohi is the descending way of notes, Sthaayi is the repetition of the same note, Sanchaari is the combination of notes from different ranges.
1.8 MATANGA’S BRIHADDESHI

In the ancient history of Indian music Bharata Muni’s Natyashastra and Matanga’s Brihaddeshi are the two important works. In the post-Bharata period the concept of raaga developed steadily and reached perfection in the hands of Matanga. The first musicologist who defined the classification of raagas into Shuddha, Chaayaalaga and Sankirna was Matanga. The style of the Sanskrit language and the contents reveal that the work belonged to the ninth century A.D. Brihaddeshi is considered to be the successor of Natyashastra.

Matanga defines his work as a treatise on sound-Naada. He says that the Naada is the most important aspect of music, there is no song, no svara, no dance without Naada. He discusses svara in details; he defines svara:- “that sound which is pleasing to the ear” and states that svaras descend from the gods.

Matanga followed Bharata as his guide to present his Brihaddeshi which has become a favourite treatise referred to by musicians, music lovers and critics. It is only in the Brihaddeshi that the term “Raaga” is found for the first time, and the aesthetic treatment of a raaga is discussed in detail. This work is also important because it deals solely with the theory of music. Some of the raagas of Matanga are found in the Shilappadikaram also.

The art of singing raagas had developed very well and Matanga had given the guidelines to be followed while elaborating a raaga i.e. Raaga Aalaapa. He has mentioned the Sapta Geetees or styles of singing songs. He has used the term Gamaka while describing ragaas and jaatis.

1.9 ANCIENT TAMIL MUSIC

Just as the Natyashastra is the earliest Sanskrit work available which provides the earliest authentic reference to Indian Music, in South India, the earliest reference to music with its technical aspects is found in the ancient Tamil Literature. The term used to denote music was “Isai” in Tamil. References are abundant to music both in literary and musical works generally described as Sangam Literature. The Sangam Age (500 B.C. to 900 A.D.) produced many works which throw light on the art and science of music.

The most important anthologies of this period are eight in number namely Ettutogai, Pattuppaattu, Purananuru, Kalittogai, Paripaadal, Ahananuru etc. Tolkaappiyam belonging to the pre-Christian era is an authoritative work on ancient Tamil grammar. It is the most ancient Tamil literary work which talked about ancient Tamil music system. The country was divided into four divisions and each division had its own music, drums, Gods, habits. People very fondly used singing and drumming to please the Gods. The pans and harps were named after the regions in which they originated. It is amazing to note that the early Greeks also had the same system in their music. The Tamil language itself has “Iyal” poetry, “Isai” music and “Naatakam” drama.

Place was fixed to conduct music, it was called Pannai and a musician was called Panar and Porunar. The Sapta Svaras sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni were called Kural, Tuttam, Kaikali, Uzhai, Eli, Villari, Tuaram respectively.
Understanding to Karnatak Music

1.10 MUSIC IN THE TAMIL EPIC
SHILAPPADIKARAM

The most important literary Tamil work where abundant information on music is found is the illustrious epic Shilappadikaram. This work was penned by Illango Adigal, the brother of Senguttuvan who was the great Chera king and reigned during the second century A.D. Even though it is a dramatic work it has given more importance to explaining the technique of music. A clear picture is drawn of the culture, traditions, social customs, rituals and religious practices of the people, the care taken by the kings for the welfare of their subjects, and the royal patronage extended to the artiste community. Shilappadikaram is considered as an epic – Muttamizhkkappiyam since it is a great work having a combination of Iyal, Isai and Naatakam. This work has ten cantos out of this six chapters have been dedicated to the art and science of music. Plenty of information is available for the music practitioners and theoreticians. Some compositions like Kummi, Ammanai, Unjal-paattu, Kappalppaqttu etc have been described in a picturesque manner. Illango, a gifted author has depicted the political and the cultural set-up of the three South Indian kingdoms of his time Chera, Chola, and Pandya.

Shilappadikaram means an “Epic of the Anklet”. This classical literary work has treated the favourite theme of music through poetry, lyrics and drama. It is a highly emotional work. It appears that Illango followed Bharata’s Natyashastra and presented the contents in such a way that it fitted into the cultural mould of the Tamils. A dance teacher was an expert in eleven types of dances, several melodies and rhythms. The music teacher was a good singer with a sweet voice; an expert who played on the musical instruments like Yaazh, Venu, Sengottu yaazh etc. and presented seven Palais or Murchanaas through modqal shift of tonic.

The epic furnishes several varieties of percussion instruments. The drum playing was indispensable for all occasions such as expeditions, sacrifices, marriages, birthday, festivals, funerals etc. The three great instruments of the Tamils were Yaazh, Kuzhal, and Maddalam.

There were four types of musical instruments namely Tolkkaravu (percussion), Narambukkarwv (stringed), Kanchakkurwv (metallic), Tulaikarwv (wind). Human voice was called Midarrukarwv. The seven svaras were called Kural, Tuttam, Kaikkilai, Uzai, Ili, Vilari and Taaram. The general name for a melody was Pan. Pan was the name assigned to raaga in Ancient Tamil music, in fact in Indian music itself. Pan was compared to the delicious taste of honey. Just as bees collect honey from the flowers of the mountain and valley regions, in the same way a singer selects the notes and arranges them in a proper combination in a beautiful manner to form a pan.

In the history of South Indian music literature Shilappadikaram stands out as a precious gem of artistic work.

1.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Fill in the blank spaces with the words given below.
(honey, Om, song, raga, Vaadi, Svara, Iyalk, basic note, Anuvaadi, Naatakam, honey, Samvaadi, dance, delicious, Isai, Naada, Pan.)

a) The sacred sound ____ was considered as the ______ of music.
b) By Bharata’s times the concept of ________, ________, and ________ became clear.

c) According to Matanga there is no ________ no ________ no ________ without ________.

d) In ancient Tamil language ______ is poetry, ______ is music and ________ is drama.

e) ______ is ________ in ancient Tamil and is compared to the ______ taste of ________.

2. Write in 5 to 6 lines on the steps in the evolution of music in ancient India.

3. Write briefly on the evidence of the art of music in the ancient Tamil literature.

Answers:

1. a) Om, basic note
   b) Vaadi, Samvaadi, Vivaadi
   c) Svara, song, dance, Naada
   d) Iyal, Isai, Naatakam
   e) Pan, raaga, delicious, honey

2. The origin of Indian music is traced to the Saama vedic chants. In the post vedic period we see the most important emergence of the Sapta Svaras – sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni. Next important points in the development are found in the Shikshaa and Puranic literature. But the most significant contributions in the development of music come from Bharata in 500 B.C. and Matanga in 9th Century A.D. Bharata’s greatest contribution is to link music to rasas and by Matanga’s time the art of raga singing was well established.

3. Just as the Natyashastra is the earliest Sanskrit work available giving authentic reference to Indian music, in south India the earliest reference to music with its technical aspects is found in the ancient Tamil literature which is generally referred to as Sangam Literature. Tolkappiyam which belongs to the pre-Christian era and which is most authoritative work on Tamil grammar speaks on the ancient Tamil music system. But the most important storehouse of information on music is the Shilappadikaram- the great Tamil epic. The epic speaks on the qualities of the music teacher. Mentions the yaazh and describes several varieties of percussion instruments.