

Traditions of Indian Music

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The Ancientness:

Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were amongst the earliest known seats of culture and civilization in India. Dating back at least to 3600 B.C. by all conservative estimates, these pre-Aryan cultures left a dancing-girl statue as well as signs of ritualistic religion for us to guess about the ancientness of music in India. In Lothal - a small village near Ahmedabad in Gujarat - convincing clues are found regarding a flourishing trading culture (which must not have barred music!). An object found in this culture-seat dating back to 3400 B.C. is surmised to be a bridge of a string instrument. The rest is all silence at this point of time. Then the Aryan-culture enters the scene with horse, fire and the will to conquer. After a period of intense struggle and an uneasy but meaningful co-existence with the pre-Aryans, India finally comes to historical certitude with the Vedas - the sacred books of the Aryas. The compilation of the Vedas was of course a progressive process, spanning many centuries and contributed to by many minds belonging to as many clans of the early Aryas. The puny sense of chronological exactitude becomes a petty absurdity in the face of the mind-boggling activity of cultural encrustation that went on for centuries. But even so, by 1000 B.C. the compilation must have been completed and by that time oral tradition must have taken charge of the whole process. Since then it was the Vedic Age. All references here lead to the Vedas. From music to medicine, from astrology to astronomy, from poetry to theology and from literature to metaphysics everything was included in the Vedas - the four of them named Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. All of them were encyclopaedic in nature, inspirational in motivation and impressive in execution. Of them all the Samaveda was the fount of all music.

To put it simply, Samaveda was a selective compilation of hymns taken from Rigveda. For the purpose of embellished and unembellished chanting at the time of sacrificial fire-rites in praise of deities like Sun, Sacred fire etc. Sama-chanting was done with or without instrumental accompaniment on Vina - the ancient lute-like instrument. The leader in the chanting was helped among others by his wife (so much for women's musical rights!). Chanting without instrumental support was regarded superior and this is worth remembering in the context of the traditional supremacy enjoyed by vocal, solo music in India - perhaps even to-day, though

vocal music seems to be losing ground to instrumental music in the recent fifty years or so. The Sama-s could be described as tune-moulds that proved effective and attractive and thus many verses were probably sung in one Sama-mould at least in the stabilized phase of the ancient Vedic music. It has been computed that 1810 verses are taken out of the total 10,000 from the Rigveda. It has also been conjectured that there were at one time, 7000 tune-moulds in circulation! It is clear that there were many musical minds active and names of some of the composer-sages left to us are Angiras, Bharadwaj, etc. after whom some of the Sama-s are named.

Sama-chanting belongs to the category which can be described as the sacred music of India. But obviously there are secular musical needs to be fulfilled in every society. Ancient, Vedic India was no exception. There were other musical varieties like Gatha, Narashamsi, Uktha which were secular. They were mostly songs in praise of victors or leaders of clans. Persons who sang these were also different from those who chanted the Sama-s. The difference of the musical import was thus reflected in the separateness of the singers. It is interesting to note that even today there are separate castes of people who earn their living by practicing performing arts - namely dance, drama and music. It is undisputed that in Ancient India the sacred or the supernatural and popular and the human were evenly juxtaposed. Inevitably it was so because there were separate musical needs to be satisfied. Along with the two main musical categories - sacred and secular - there was instrumental music also. There were wind instruments like Vamshi (Flute), percussion instruments like Dundubhi (drum) and string instruments like Vina (lute). All these possessed variety and differed in shapes, sizes, number of strings, material etc. But it is not intended here to give a chronological or historical account of Indian music. The idea is to make it easier to grasp the longevity of musical impulses of the ancient Indians. Many of the features of contemporary Indian music are seen to have an embryonic existence in Vedic music. Performing arts tend to have a continuity of their own and the idea of progress in these arts does not mean a total disappearance or disutility of earlier characteristics. It will be no exaggeration to say that there is nothing completely new in musical arts. But it is also truthful to maintain that there is nothing really old or outdated in them! Obviously this is a paradox, but one which is better to accept in the interest of getting a sense of belonging and cohesiveness.

The Oral Tradition

An important general feature of Indian music must be noted before we move on. How was this music passed on to the coming generations? How did the successive generations manage to learn from their ancestors and carry on the

heritage to their immediate or distant successors? This is an important consideration for anything that needs or boasts of a continuity. Usually, writing, printing or such other media are resorted to perpetuate, store and carry forward memories, messages as also dreams of one generation to the future ones. But there are cultures which in spite of their unquestionable sophistication select not to suffer the disadvantages of the rigidity, definiteness and chronological rootedness that accompany printing etc. This is the main rationale behind the preference shown for the oral over the written in many high cultures. Though a detailed exposition of the theme of oral tradition is not possible and perhaps necessary in the present context, the following brief enumeration of the chief characteristics of it will be helpful to understand some outstanding qualities of music in India.

(1) Importance of the Word

Word of mouth is invested with special sanctity. Giving promises, taking oaths (or showering curses!) are all features of oral tradition. Music too places its reliance on the oral manifestation of the human expressive desire, resorting to the medium of sound. Music is not written down. Music-scores do not find a place on the Indian musical scene.

(2) Audience - participation

By corollary the oral is also aural. Listening and listeners are regarded as very important. In fact they are not treated as passive receivers in a communicative process but as knowledgeable participants in a process of creation. Definite role is assigned to the audience and Indian musicians feel deeply concerned about the quality of the audience-participation. The anxiety is to establish a rapport with the audience to ensure a two-way flow in the music-making. Even the seating-arrangement reflects the priority given to the audience. In an ideal (traditional) Indian musical concert, the audience is at hand-shaking distance from the artist. The verbal as well as the non-verbal responses of the members of the audience are thus easily perceived by the artist, who thrives on them and soars higher, or dives down to musical destruction if the audience is of that type - an audience that favours stony silence or a frivolous restlessness to chosen vocal response or an immediate gestural conveying of approval/ disapproval.

(3) The Peaceful Coexistence:

Like the famous 'unwritten' constitution of the United Kingdom, Oral tradition too does not preclude either writing or the written. It only means the emphases are on not reducing things to writing in a major way and in matters of essence. In the present context therefore no notation system of an elaborate nature has developed in India. Rudimentary notation of both the tonal and the rhythmic aspects did exist in India - but this could at the most be described as skeletal presentation of the musical intent! In a way this proved conducive to the artist's

freedom to improvise. Broadly speaking it can be maintained that Indian music is distinguished from many other musical systems of the world due to the immense possibility of improvisation it holds in store for each and every artist ready to take the risk. This is the reason why terms like interpretation, spontaneity, inspiration, insight etc. assume such a halo in Indian musical thought. Much is left to the imagination of artists. There are more of inbuilt opportunities of music-making in Indian music. Rightly this has attracted attention of discerning students of music the world-over. Only the texts of the compositions or such bare structural props are found 'written' in India. All elaboration remains tantalizingly intangible.

(4) The Guru:

For the sort of music that is to emerge finally in the oral tradition, who teaches and how is extremely significant. In fact, it is felt that no mere teacher can be expected to carry on the alchemic process of transforming a learner of skills into a creative artist. Hence the special institution of the Guru which is so highly valued in Indian music and also very significantly, in Indian philosophy and metaphysics. Guru is a person of immense learning and patience. He is interested in his disciple as a whole being. (There are no fixed class-hours in their relationship!). Ideally the disciple lives with the Guru, serves him with devotion and dedication and often without recompensing him monetarily. In return the Guru is expected to equip the disciple not only with the required musical skills but also with an insight into the workings of the musical microcosm. Music is not just a branch of knowledge but is a complete philosophy of life. The preponderance of religious/devotional compositions along with love-lyrics is thus an important indication of the aim to be attained through music. It can be described as a very conscious effort to attain the ineffable through the direct power of sensuous sound and sense - the instrumentality through which the transmutation is realized.

(5) The Sutra Way:

In agreement with the spirit of the oral tradition in music, the Guru explains music while imparting training mainly through aphoristic verbal formulae that are brief, suggestive and provocatively in need of accompanying demonstration. The non-verbal demonstration is to be supplied by the Guru, as and when required and also according to the needs of individual disciples. The Sutras clinch the point but leave out the explanation because the latter is the variable in the total communication process that music-teaching/learning is.

(6) The Role of Memory:

With documentation kept to the minimum memory becomes a faculty to be revered and cultivated. All musical learning is required to be at the beck and call of the practitioner. Hence special memorizing techniques have been developed. Repetition, multiple-association, ritualistic context and such other features form part

of the mnemonic techniques developed and sedulously practised by Indian musicians.

(7) Ritualism:

There is a very definite inclination towards ritualism in oral tradition. Rules are laid down about the procedures to be followed, sequences to be observed and also about how the environment is to be controlled/arranged while teaching, learning or practising music. Myths are in circulation about the effectiveness or otherwise of adhering to or deviating from certain ceremonial practices etc. In fact there are rituals in respect of accepting a Guru/disciple, performing in public in presence of elders. All are motivated towards concentrating on reachable and not so reachable forces from the conscious and unconscious layers of individual minds so as to pursue the musical practices concerned most effectively.

In reality characteristics of the oral tradition can hardly be overestimated in the context of Indian music even today. Because, though music-education, propagation is getting increasingly institutionalized all over the country, the products of these are hardly comparable to the products of the Guru-Shishya way in artistic excellence and craftsmanship. As yet no way has been found to synthesize the modes of the 'moderns' with those of Indian identity. It is on the background of the extensively and often unobtrusively operating oral tradition that the phenomenon of Indian music is to be appreciated.

(8) Plurality of Music-s:

While referring to Indian music it is generally overlooked that India is as vast as its culture is ancient. As far as music is concerned, it is perhaps the only country which has two fully developed systems of art-music namely Hindustani and Carnatic. Of the total 30 states and union territories, about 25 can be counted as having separate cultural personalities of their own. Of these, 20 units are covered by the Hindustani system of art-music and five by the Carnatic system of music. Art-music as a category is called 'classical music' in India. It is necessary to remember that unlike the Western nomenclature in art-histories, the term 'classical' does not connote in India a definite chronological, historical aspect. The Indian usage is more quality-oriented. 'Classical' Indian music means music that is more 'scientific', more restrained in emotional expression and one which is not subject to day-to-day changes in people's likes and dislikes or fashions. It is a more durable musical manifestation because it answers to more basic human urges for order, peace or restlessness which is not due to material causes or mundane matters. The point is that 'two' systems of this type of 'Classical' music have been co-existing in India since the 14th century. In addition to these two art-musics, many states (when taken as ethnological entities) have folk-music of their own. Though in absence of thorough area-studies it is difficult to be categorical in this respect, it is possible to maintain

that at least 17 of the 25 political units mentioned above have their recognizable and considerable bodies of folk-musics. When one adds to these musics those of various tribal groups - the picture of musical India becomes almost complete. A conservative estimate sets the population of the unassimilated tribals to be 5 million and of those relatively assimilated around 20 millions. This abundance and variety of music with more or less overlapping areas tempts one to say that musically speaking India is a related group of musical cultures embodied physically and politically in one nation. In face of such a staggering variety of musical manifestations expertise, examination and final evaluation of Indian music should appear only a recurring and desirable dream! Of late popular music has been recognized as a legitimate musical category. A chief characteristic of this category is that it is media-manufactured. Music that is generated and propagated by Indian radio and films is of such a gigantic proportion and un-assessed influence that, coupled with these, musical scene in India seems to defy analysis. It is on this background that one speaks of the plurality of musics in India. It is also in this context that one is forced to take a discretionary decision - to consider only the category of art-music for the purpose of getting acquainted with the musical heritage of India which is referred to in the title as Sangeet.

Art-musics: Main Elements

There are some elements that are common to both the systems of art-music mentioned earlier; namely, Hindustani and Carnatic. It is desirable to know a little more about them before proceeding further.

The Melodic Way:

The first element to note in Indian music is that it is melodic. Putting it simply melody is a way of organizing musical notes - the primary material of any musician. In melody one note is used at a time and there is a succession of such notes. In Harmony, the other way of organizing the notes - more than one note is the basic unit and these notes are used simultaneously. Both systems have their own advantages and disadvantages. What one chooses depends on what one wants to achieve - musically speaking. The melodic way is perhaps an Asian quality found in many other countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq etc.

The Solo way:

It is not difficult to imagine that melodic manner of ordering one's musical material goes hand in hand with the importance of another musical feature : the 'solo' element. When one person is the chief and continued centre from which music emanates we can take it as an example of 'solo'. Of course, Western music too has

solo-singing. But it is no exaggeration to say that the Western musical expression is mainly choral/ orchestral while the Indian musical manifestation is chiefly solo. In spite of the obvious overlapping involved musical systems can be classified according to the role assigned to the solo/ collective expression. In such a classification Indian art-music is comfortably placed among the solo-systems. Not that it lacks 'musical togetherness'. In fact right from the early days vocal and instrumental groupings of various sizes and types are mentioned. But even so, there is no 'orchestral' or 'choral' music as the terms are understood in the Western musical system. At the most there was and is group-music (i.e. music where more than one vocalist/instrumentalist come together). But they all sing/play simultaneously and also perform the same musical phrase etc. Individuals merge together to perform in such a way that the powerful impression will be of one music - homogeneous and unidirectional.

Primacy of Vocal Music

Another very important aspect of Indian music is the primacy of vocal music as compared to the stature enjoyed by instrumental music. As indicated earlier, there is no orchestral music in Indian tradition. More important is the fact that : many of the instruments do only what vocal music does. In other words, instruments rarely have musical 'forms' of their own. They imitate-more or less-successfully what a vocalist does. In imagination, idiom and ideals an Indian instrumentalist redraws the map already provided by vocal music. Very often instrumentalists are graded according to the degree of success they achieve in 'translating' vocal music on their respective instruments. This is especially so as far as tonal instruments of the string and wind variety are concerned. Examples of Sarod, Sitar, Santoor, Sarangi, Violin, Vina, Shehnai, Flute, Harmonium will easily come to mind. Significantly, rhythm instruments of the tonal variety like Pakhawaj, Tabla have their own forms. By and large, Indian instrumental music is yet to come out of the shadow of Indian vocal music. However, the question of primacy should not be confused with that of popularity. In the matter of primacy, what is involved is the maturity and variety of the independent idiom of instruments concerned. While the Pakhawaj and the Tabla have ripened into adulthood, the other instruments are on their way to maturity. Their potential is not questioned here. It is only suggested that they have a long way to go before attaining a really full-grown status. That they are moving in this direction is clear from the fact that instruments like Sitar, Sarod, Sarangi which have attracted a large number of non-Indian ears were hardly regarded as concert-solo instruments barely a hundred years ago. From purely accompaniment stage such instruments have moved ahead but they have to cover considerable ground as yet.

The Twin-Systems

We have already mentioned the simultaneous and continued existence of two systems of art-music in India, namely the Hindustani and the Carnatic. Some more factual information could be usefully given here regarding the twins.

Obviously there was one system of art-music covering the whole sub-continent till about the 14th century. The regional musics were of course there but the first mention of the Hindustani-Karnatak distinction is reliably attributed to Haripal's Sangit Sudhakara written between 1309-1312 A.D. It is probable that the entrenchment of the Muslims of Persian origin in the Deccan around the same time hastened the process of polarization. Followers of Islam were the first outsiders who came to India, settled here, but did not allow religious and cultural assimilation with the original Hindus. Hence cultural confrontation (and therefore mutual exchange of influences) was possible. The probable process that ultimately led to the emergence and autonomous development of two systems of co-existing art-musics could be simplified and presented as follows:

pre-fourteenth century Indian music + Persian influence = Hindustani music.

pre-fourteenth century Indian music + Dravidian linguistic and cultural influence = Karnatak music.

Further, the practice of calling the Karnatak system as Carnatic originates from the British period (i.e. after 1757). From the ancient times the present Tamilnadu was known as Karunadu. This was turned to Carnatic by the British. However, this way of putting it has another justification. All the four major linguistic-geographical areas in the South have contributed to the development of Karnatak music as it is today and hence naming it as Karnatak was to unnecessarily confine the validity-area to only one of these regions namely Karnatak. The change to the appellation 'Carnatic' appears to have come to stay. All this should help one to understand the abundant similarities - dissimilarities between the two systems. The systems are so to say, sister-cultures. The similarities between them are mostly of generic nature and the differences are those brought about by acquisition, or nurturing of music in a different ethos. As they stand today they are more different than similar in practice, performance and conception. The common elements are now confined to the terminology and the level of philosophical abstraction which is in a sense far removed from the act of listening to music as a layman.

Raga / Ragam, Tala-Talam

These two concepts are broadly speaking common to both the systems and additionally, the two phenomena mentioned, distinguish Indian music from other musical systems in the world. It can be truly said that to understand Raga (or Ragam

as Carnatic system calls it) and Tala (Talam in Carnatic parlance) is to understand Indian music. These two are the core-concepts. Along with solo element and melodic way these two help in raising the impressive architecture of Indian music.

As Raga occupies such an important place, many traditional musical compositions trace the idea of Raga simply and succinctly. Without technical details the idea of Raga can be understood by considering the following steps:

First there was the Will.

Then there was the Sound.

Musically acceptable sounds came next.

These sounds were arranged pitch-wise i.e. from higher to lower and vice versa.

Ascending movement (low to high) and descending movement (high to low) revealed the phenomenon of octave space.

Octave arrangement revealed that certain sounds agree/disagree with certain other sounds. Frameworks provided by agreeable sounds were found to be innumerable. Within the framework it was possible to weave many patterns if some rules provided a firm base.

Elaboration techniques were formulated to generate new patterns.

Now all these steps mean one thing as far as music-creating is concerned: one must have rules as well as the freedom to break them. Some technical terms will help to understand how this balance is achieved in case of Raga.

Musically attractive sounds were mainly sounds which were judged as consonants. These were called Swara-s i.e. notes. As such sounds recurred on lower and higher levels in any movement from a reference Swara, the concept of basic, recurring frame or mould crystallized - this was Grama (i.e. Scale).

From the member-notes of the Grama various sequential changes, accentuation changes and inclusion-exclusion acts were realized. This is Raga-frame. Making allowance for its flexibility we may preferably call it Raga-circles. This basic-frame can be further exploited by changing, manipulating order, pace, frequency of the member notes. This is the famous improvised elaboration of the Indian Raga. The ultimate end of musical sound is reached at this stage. This stage is called improvisation.

Before discussing improvisation, we must however have a brief look at the Tala. Following stages are relevant:

Every note (and therefore all music) requires some 'duration' (i.e. time-space) to realize its musical purpose. This is known as Kāl (time). As music cannot

be a continuous sound process, silences become important and hence it is also assigned a role in building the duration. We can describe the situation by saying that sounding duration and silent duration - when taken together - mark musical time. Marking of the musical time create Tala. The process of marking is made concrete by acoustic dividers called Matra (beats). This is how the time-flow gets punctuated by the Matras and we become aware of the duration. However, the story is not yet complete. An unending line of Matras will soon become meaningless. Therefore, rather arbitrarily, the archetypal Indian musical mind decided to impose a pattern on the flow by limiting it to a definite number of beats to six, seven etc. Thus after counting these Matras there was an inevitable returning to the first beat. The Tala too became circular. Once the circularity imposes a pattern of definite expanse on the time-flow (which otherwise moves only forward-backward), then a musician can play with the in-between beats that sound in the duration defined by any two first-beats. The first-beats become the main anchoring points. They are called 'Sam' - the point in which the music and the Tala-cycle strikes exact correspondence. Play with the non-Sam beats obviously yields further patterns in sound and silence which ultimately all music is. This arabesque quality of music is felt in all musics by even a casual listener. In fact the first impact of music is felt at this level - namely the level of sound patterns. Deeper the impact at this level, surer will be the possibility of understanding the intricacies of musical forms, their structures and the individual architectures. Coming back to Tala, by redistributing the non-Sam beats, by spacing them, clustering them etc. one can improvise to a certain extent. Once upon a time there were one hundred and eight Talas in Indian musical repertoire. The historical process of changes in musical attitudes has now brought down the number to around 15-16. Proliferation of the basic time-cycles i.e. Talas was obviously felt to be unproductive. Intensive cultivation of a limited number of Tala-cycles was preferred. The result seems to be interesting. Indian rhythmic patterns have excited the imagination of even lay listeners.

These are then the basic ideas of Indian music taken as a whole: Raga, Tala and improvisation. To both the systems practised in India, these are common. Though there are additions, subtractions of some sub-characteristics, the fundamental framework of the ideas remains unaltered and hence they can always be referred to. Everything that happens in Indian music maintains relations with all of these or some of these. Hence it is a good policy to refer to the trinity of a Raga, Tala and improvisation whenever one is exposed to Indian music. Raga and Tala are the two concentric circles - the centre being the artist and improvisation is the general strategy he uses while dealing with them.

After all, these fundamentals of Indian music need some channels through which they can be communicated. Just as in case of literature we have drama, novel,

short story, lyric etc, as crystallized moulds that enable the author to express himself through his own responses to the already available structure, similarly there are forms in music too. Musical forms are a combined result of Raga, Tala, linguistic sense - non-sense and conventions of the performing tradition. If historically enumerated the number of musical forms would be many more than at present. But we are referring to only those major musical forms of Indian art-music that are in circulation today. This narrows down their number. Some of the contemporary forms could be shown to have a long ancestry - with some changes in the accompanying terminology and structural features. However, that is not our purpose and we focus on the current practice as revealed in the performing tradition of music.

Another important point is that most of the Indian instrumental music only translates vocal music. There are very few instrumental musical forms independently crystallized. Hence vocal forms of music should have priority in consideration.

Indian art-music is Raga-music. The first musical form in which it is manifested is the pre-Tala stage of Raga-elaboration. This type of elaboration is not associated with every rendering but it is employed by musicians quite often. When the pre-Tala elaboration is executed with the help of meaningless consonant-vowel clusters like Nom, tom, Ri, dana etc. it is called 'Nom-Tom'. However, it can also be realized by using the vowels A, I etc. These are then called Alap. The Carnatic corresponding item is Alapana.

The category of musical forms that use Raga, Tala and meaningless linguistic clusters comes next. As is to be expected, the category cannot boast of many forms. Hindustani music has it in the main two: Tarana and Trivat. Tarana consists of a composition in Raga-Tala that uses syllables like Dir Dir Tan Na Na. Trivat differs from Tarana in one important respect: it is composed of rhythmic letter-clusters of Pakhawaj - the ancient, two-faced horizontal drum in India. Sargam - the third form in the category has compositions consisting of Sol-Fa names. It is clear that though Sol-Fa names are semantically empty, they have some musical import as the Sol-Fa names denote definite pitch-levels in the musical gamut of the Raga concerned. From the Carnatic system, Tillana corresponds to the Tarana while Kalpana Swaram can be equated with the Sargam.

The third category of musical forms is distinguished from the previous two because in this category language is meaningfully used. Naturally, the category includes greater number of forms in both the system.

The Hindustani Dhrupad-Dhamar has a long history. A Dhrupad composition consists of four parts: Sthayi, Antara, Sanchari and Abhog. Usually in praise of God, king, music or nature, sung in two stages: the pre-Tala and the Tala-stage. The previous stage is known as Nom-Tom described earlier. Nom-Tom is used for an unhindered Raga-elaboration. With the on-set of the Tala the four-part composition is chiefly used for rhythmic elaboration as the words are set through various paces without breaking the individual word-units. The singing style is virile and aptly the form is practised and performed by male-singers. Also equally apposite is the fact that the rhythm accompaniment is provided on Pakhawaj - a very sonorous drum. At one time Dhrupad was the temple and court-music of India.

In a way Dhamar is an adjunct form - a form usually going hand in hand with Dhrupad. Unlike Dhrupad, Dhamar is always sung in the Tala which carries the same name. In a tempo which is slightly faster than that of Dhrupad, it describes Hori - the colour-festival - though often of Krishna. To the extent it goes out of religious and bardic themes it displays a secular element. Being in faster tempo also acts as a fillip to the less serious mood. However, the singing style is similar to that of Dhrupad. In addition to what has been stated above both these are also known for their accent on maintaining the purity of Raga. The very way in which the singing of these forms is structured precludes the possibility of the artist trying to take any liberties with the Raga structure. Dhrupad and Dhamar forms are the austere ways of presenting Hindustani music.

Carnatic music does not seem to have any musical form that corresponds to Dhrupad and Dhamar of Hindustani music. However, in so far as the austere and purist attitude to the Raga is concerned, Varnam, which is usually presented at the beginning of a Carnatic concert seems to correspond to one aspect of Dhrupad. Varnam presents Raga in its most authentic and pure structure. No Raga-elaboration is included in its rendering. It has two parts: Pada Varnam and Tana Varnam. The former has text, the latter consists of both text and solfeggio.

The next important word-bound form of Hindustani vocal music is the Khayal. Khayal is sub-divided into Bada Khayal and Chhota-Khayal. The former is in slow tempo and is also loosely structured as far as the pattern etched by the Tala-frame is concerned. More often than not the Khayal composition itself, as well as the Raga-elaboration done with its help, both are woven around the Tala-beats. The element of freedom is also manifest in the melodic line of singing taken as a whole. It is less rigid and deliberately flexible unlike that of Dhrupad. Both the khayals have two parts - A Sthayi and Antara. Improvisation is present in both and hence the duration of presenting these varies from singer to singer and sometimes from one occasion to another in case of the same artist! Hindustani vocal art-music is today

dominated by Khayal-singing. Hence a brief description of its presentation will be in order.

At the inception Sthayi and Antara are presented. This gives the listener a firm context about the nature of the Raga intended by the artists, about the individual Tala used by the artist as well as about the compositor-text, tempo and such other matters. The Sthayi usually dwells in the lower half of the scale and the Antara in the upper half. This is to ensure that the Raga is covered in its entirety.

The Sthayi-Antara taken together provide the Raga-skeleton that is explored with the help of Alaps. Chiefly Alaps are freely rendered tonal movements improvised by the singer and presented with the help of the vowel-sound A. As is known this vowel-sound has a long reach and its use enables an uninterrupted, fluid presentation. Generally, vowel-sounds possess these qualities as opposed to the stopping properties of the consonants. The Alaps are in slow tempo to begin with but are gradually accelerated. Similarly they usually start on lower pitches and move on to higher levels. However, to facilitate the latter-level Alaps, the centre of elaboration is shifted to the Antara - which, as already mentioned - is itself composed in the upper half of the octave.

Sometimes intermittently with the Alaps but often next to them come the Bol-Alaps, i.e. Alaps which are superimposed on the words (i.e. Bols) of the text of the composition. Due to the consonant-clusters involved of the flow of vocalization is restricted but the meaning of the words adds an evocative element to the whole procedure.

Almost the penultimate stage in Khayal rendering is bol-tan. The Bols are here superimposed on fast-tempo vocalization with content similar to that of Alaps. The movement is rhythm-oriented and Bol-s facilitate the rhythm-stresses than mere Alaps. The tempo is also on a gradual increase and there is clear indication of the musical climax in the making.

The climax is finally realized in Tan-s. They are fast tempo Alap-passages with a slight leaning towards the element of virtuosity. Rhythmic patterns are also on the increase and both contribute to a type of rounding-off of the Raga-image so sedulously built up. The Tan-portion of Raga-elaboration is not confined to Bada Khayal. In fact quite often it comes to the fore in the Chhota-khayal. The intrinsic faster tempo of the Chhota khayal is obviously conducive to Tans.

One warning is perhaps necessary. The slowness or fastness of tempo is very much an artist-centred phenomenon. He decides the tempo which he wants to treat as slow or fast. There is no absolute time in Indian music just as there is no absolute pitch!

Kriti in Carnatic music is comparable to Khayal of Hindustani music in importance and musical domination due to its capacity to allow individual artists enough scope of imaginative elaboration. Kriti - (lit. that which is composed) has three parts: Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam. There may be two Charanams. In that case the second carries the name of the composer and hence is known as Mudracharanam.

Pallavi is the opening section and being the burden of the composition it is repeated after Anupallavi and Charanam. Pallavi is 'to blossom' and aptly it opens up the composition. Anupallavi - as the name suggests (anu - to follow) comes next. Like Sthayi of the Khayal, Pallavi ranges over the lower parts of the octave and like Antara, Anupallavi explores the upper reaches. Both together do justice to the Raga - taken as a whole.

A high-point in Kriti-singing is the Sangati-s. Basically they are variations on various melodic themes introduced in the composition itself. Sangati-s can be linked to the Alaps of the Khayal-singing. Very often Sangati-s are also composed by the original composer.

Neraval, like Bol-tan use the text of the song for superimposing varied tonal and rhythmic movements and these are mostly extemporized.

Unlike the khayal-singing, kritis do not have Tans, but they have abundance of solfeggio - singing both extempore and pre-composed. The latter is known as Chitta Swara or Swar Sahitya.

There is no separate Chhota khayal-like composition in Kriti-singing but a passage known as 'Madhyamakala' (i.e. medium or quicker tempo) - singing occurs either at the end of Anupallavi or the Charanam or both. Apparently both Chhota khayal and these passages serve the same aesthetic purpose of moving towards musical climax.

Next word-user musical form in Carnatic vocal music has probably no counterpart in Hindustani art-music. It is the Padam, which is basically a song with regular sectional arrangements. Raga-elaboration is not its main aim.

Javali like Padam occupies a place in the Carnatic repertoire of lighter varieties of music. Unlike the other Carnatic forms, Javali is secular and non-devotional. It is a love-song in three sections i.e. Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam. Its music corresponds to its content and forms a good vehicle for Abhinaya (gestures and acting). Javali comes nearest to Thumri and Dadra of the Hindustani repertoire. Thumri obviously was a dance-drama oriented form in origin with love-sentiment to the fore. It is not surprising that the Raga-rules are most relaxed in this form.

Mixture of Raga-s is, in fact encouraged and expected. Words are very evocatively used in Thumri-singing and perhaps that accounts for its wide and easy appeal. Dadra is identical in content and mood but is set in Dadra Tala of six beats and Waltz-like rhythm. This special lilt distinguishes it from Thumri.

The last important pair of musical forms in Indian music is Raga Sagar/Raga-Malika. Both are essentially strings of Raga-s in which different Raga-s are used for successive stanzas. Passage from one Raga to the other has to be both smooth and skilful and this is the main attractive feature of the form. Raga-Sagar is the Hindustani version and Raga-Malika the Carnatic version of the idea of bringing many Raga-s together in an attractive manner. The pleasure is both sensuous and intellectual.

These then are the major forms of Indian music considered as a whole. There are many other forms in both the systems but they are less heard and lesser performed.

A word here about instrumental art-music in India is in order. As far as Raga-music is in question, by and large all the instruments try to reproduce the corresponding ideas of vocal music. They of course add their own timbre and other sound-effects to the musical content. But that does not seem to make any essential difference. Paucity of separate compositions for instruments that have attained solo-status today, is symptomatic of the fact that they have yet to formulate their own distinctive language. The truth of the matter is that instrumental music is not as autonomous as it could be. In spite of some comparatively recent exceptions Indian music traces one and the same map of musical ideas in both vocal and instrumental categories. The main instruments that are used in Raga-music are: Sarangi, Violin, Shehnai, Bansuri, Sitar, Sarod and Been (Hindustani Music) and Violin, Nagswaram, Flute, Vina (Carnatic music).

The Been is perhaps the oldest among the Hindustani instruments. It follows the Dhrupad form in its renderings. Violin, Shehnai and Bansuri follow the pattern laid down by Khayal. Sitar and Sarod have recently succeeded in formulating two basic styles of rendering Raga-music. One is Gayaki Ang i.e. the style based on vocal music and the other is Gatkari Ang or Tant Ang i.e. a style based on the compositions specifically designed for the instrument in question. Obviously these processes can be viewed as preludes to a crystallization of richer styles of the instruments themselves.

Sitar and Sarod have succeeded today in finalizing two basic types of composition-forms. The slower one is called Masitkhani and the faster one Razakhani. These obviously seem to follow the logic of musical mapping

exemplified by Khayal. In the pre-Tala stage they naturally seem to have selected the Nom Tom style of Raga-elaboration. After the detailed slow treatment of the Raga in Alap (traced in the Nom Tom style) they move to 'Jod' (coupled, paired) phase. This is almost the double of the earlier Alap in tempo and more importantly Jod includes one stroke on the side-string followed by one on the main. (This is why it is called Jod). Jod playing is followed by 'Jhala' - the fast-tempo exhilarating musical elaboration in which the last side-string (with the highest pitch) is struck twice or thrice after one stroke on the main string. This yields patterns of 1,2,2,2 or 1,2,2 - type in a fast tempo. This is the conclusion of the pre-Tala stage. Follows Masitkhani in slow tempo. It is mainly embellished with rhythmic patterns. In the Razakhani which is set in fast tempo, there is enough scope for faster Tana-patterns. This is the general pattern followed by Sitar, Sarod and to an extent even by Violin, Sarangi, Shehnai, Flute. This is the reason why the progressions are described in detail.

It has been already pointed out that other instruments like Violin, Sarangi, Shehnai, Vina etc. do not have musical forms of their own. Depending on the ability of the individual musicians they recreate vocal music in their own timbre as totally as possible. Thus we come to the two developed drum-types in Indian music: the horizontal, two-faced, barrel-shaped Pakhawaj (Hindustani Music), Mridangam (Carnatic music) and the vertical drum-pair Tabla.

Pakhawaj and Mridangam differ in that the former is more resonant and the latter sharper in timbre. Timbre-peculiarities, coupled with the specific attitudes that Hindustani and Carnatic systems hold towards Tala have resulted in the distinctive formulation of the languages of these instruments. The art of rhythmic playing has been evolving from at least 200 A.D. and even documentary evidence is overwhelming. Broadly speaking it seems that both the horizontal and vertical drums were widely prevalent in ancient India. Originally the drum-vessels were made of clay and the right-hand drum (in case of the vertical drum-pair) as also the right drum-face (in case of the horizontal barrel-faced drum) were partially covered with a mixture of wet clay. Sometime during the evolution three things seem to have happened: the clay vessel was replaced by a wooden one; the right-hand drum or the right drum-face were treated to a partial, centred and permanent coverage by a paste made of powdered iron, carbon etc, called Syahi (i.e. ink); simultaneously the left-hand drum and left drum-face were treated similarly with permanent and temporary coverage of Syahi and paste made of wheat/rice flour respectively. The result is that in all cases the left-hand produces a bass marginally adjustable sound and the right-hand a high-pitched, adjustable tone. Combination of these sounds, produced skilfully with palms and fingers of both hands make the alphabets of these three instruments namely Pakhawaj, Mridangam and Tabla. The alphabets naturally and ultimately lead us to forms realized through rhythm-instruments.

The Pakhawaj-player selects the Tala-cycle (usually Choutal or Dhamar) and plays the Tala-pattern. This is the first step. (A person is independently in charge of keeping time by clapping methodically. He is called Talpani, pani = hand). Next he plays variations on this basic pattern. The variations are known as Theka-s. Hence, one Tala can have many Theka-s provided the variations in the sound-clusters i.e. Bols of the original Tala are not too radical. The Theka-s are succeeded by Rela-s. These are compositions of Bols that are conducive to their successive employment at a fast tempo - a tempo so paced that a continuous pulsating and sweet sound-line is kept audible. Again there are variations carried out by change of accentuation etc. though the two considerations of pace and resonance are not lost sight of. After the Rela-s, Paran (from Sanskrit Parna-leaf i.e. evenly distributed pattern of veins!) are presented - and they are of infinite variety. Here improvisation is at its highest. Many Bol-s not occurring in the Tala are employed, the composition itself can continue for many cycles before it comes to the first beat of the Tala i.e. Sam. There might also be many improvised sub-patterns starting from various Matra-s of the Tala, and lastly there might be many Tihai-s i.e. sub-patterns which are completed when they are repeated thrice.

These then are the main forms of Pakhawaj in their normal sequence. It is of course to be remembered that this is a generalized statement and does not consider the accompaniment role of the instrument.

Tabla - the Hindustani drum-pair is of comparatively recent origin though it has attained recognizable maturity of language and form. In its solo-presentation, the artist chooses a particular Tala and then starts from Peshkar (from 'pesh karna' (Hindi) - 'to present') which is slow-tempo elaboration of a composition that consists of Bol-s with definite weight and distinctness. The elaboration concentrates on sober presentation of rhythmic patterns rather than dazzling percussion - effects. Bol-s that are not included in the Tala-structure itself are used but it is ensured that the total effect is of listening to a serious presentation of language-units that are basic to the Tabla and relevant to the Tala taken up for elaboration. Next in the sequence is Kayada which is played in medium tempo and moves away from the Bol-s of the Tala concerned. But as the term suggests ('Kayada' - law) in the elaborations that follow, no freedom (or less of it) is taken and the patterns are necessarily couched in the Bol-s of the Kayada itself. After the Kayada, Rela appears with a rhythmic aggression that is difficult to miss. All that is said about this form while dealing with Pakhawaj applies in case of Tabla too. A sense of correspondence that we obtain in case of Rela is strengthened when we come to the next form known as Gat. Perhaps derived from the Sanskrit 'Gati' - motion, tempo - it lives up to the expectations aroused by the name due to the amazing variety of rhythmic patterns displayed in it. Here the Bol-s of the Tala do not exert any binding influence. Similarly there are no

restrictions as far as the number of tempo, a single Gat-composition can include in it. Very often the Gat-s conclude with Tihai-s which again abound both in number and variety.

The solo of Mridangam is different from the Hindustani counterparts mainly on two counts: Firstly, the Tala-system of the South differs from that of the North very significantly. Secondly, the Mridangam-timbre is less resonant than the Pakhawaj. It is sharp and short-lived. The abrupt, staccato quality of the timbre and the well-computed system of the seven Talas combine and give a solo-idiom that is intellectual and mathematically precise but which does not give much scope to explore nuances of instrumental timbre. Rhythm in Carnatic music has three primary elements: Anudruta, Druta and Laghu. Anudruta is one beat, Druta is one beat and a rest Laghu is an Anudruta and finger count. Laghu is of five varieties according to the number of units contained. Permutation-combination of the three elements yield seven Tala-s and each Tala having five varieties. We have, in all, thirty-five Tala-s in the contemporary Carnatic system. Significantly, the solo on Mridangam is called Tala-Prastar - elaboration of the Talas. On the less resonant Mridangam sharper and more minute time-divisions are possible - hence instead of gradations and variations of timbre, intricate patterns realized through time-divisions come to the forefront. This ruling passion for time-division and not for chiaroscuro effect actualized through more and varied grees of resonance is reflected in the fact that there are no Theka-s for the Tala-s in Carnatic music. This same fact accounts for the Carnatic musician's listener's keeping time by hands and fingers through-out a performance. And thirdly the tempo is never less than medium - as the sound of the instrument is not resonant enough to leave behind an acoustic trail. This is also the reason why playing of Ghatam - a clay-pot - could establish itself in the Carnatic system. Thus within a time-measure Mridangam-player is at liberty to weave patterns based on precise calculations without the need felt for the generative moulds of rhythmic 'forms' like Peshkar, Kayada etc. It is the chosen Tala - the cyclic time-measure with its individual pattern which is itself the subject of rhythmic elaboration.

Here we end this brief introduction to Indian art-music. Needless to say that many facets of both the systems are not touched upon. Equally evident is the deliberate avoiding of technical jargon and complexities. But the attempt has been to lay down the basic ideas that unexceptionally occur in musical India. The aim is to whet the appetite of the interested. Nothing more is claimed. To try to achieve more would have been a foolhardy ambition - insulting to the magnitude of Indian musical reality.