

INDIAN MUSIC

Introduction

Indian classical music is a tradition nearly three thousand years old, the basis of which can be traced to the holy scriptures of the Hindus, the *Vedas*. According to Hindu mythology music originated from the first sound of the universe, the sound of 'om'. *Om* is also called the ***Naada Brahama*** ('the first note') as is supposed to be the purest sound ever produced. In fact, the correct rendition of it is believed to clear the system of the karmic cycle.

In India, music had a philosophical significance. Around 1500 B.C, an Eastern Mediterranean race called the Aryans invaded the country from the Pamir area in the extreme south of Russia. They drove away the indigenous Dravidians and took the place for themselves. They, then, begin what is known as the Vedic period of India. The word Veda means knowledge. There is a book of hymns which emphasis the correct pitching of the voice on three levels. The Indians treat the human voice as the most important form of instrument though they had others like the sitar (A pluck string instrument) and drums. The Indians thought their chants were composed by the Gods and were assigned to natural things like heaven and days of the weeks etc.

Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess of learning and wisdom, is often depicted as playing the *veena*, an ancient string instrument. Many musicians worship *Sarasvati* before a practice session or a performance. The Hindu god *Krishna* is often depicted as playing the *bansuri* (the north Indian bamboo flute) and there exist many a mystic legends around the romances of *Krishna* and his *bansuri*. It is not surprising then that the prime themes of Hindustani music are *rasleelas* (Hindu devotionals) of Krishna and Nature's splendor.

A listener coming from a background of Western music should not judge Indian classical music on the same parameters. Indian music does not have harmonies and is more of a solo-oriented form which relies heavily on melody and rhythm, and the ability of a performer to improvise on stage. Most performances are not rehearsed and the success of a performance relies on how well the performer can induce a certain mood in the minds of the listeners.

Elements in Indian Music

Rag (or Raga)

Defining rag (pronounced rarg) is difficult. It is partly a scale, but also a melody and a set of characteristic melodic shapes. A rag often has a different pattern going up and coming down. Certain notes have special significance: the tonic, called SA and always heard in the drone accompaniment, but also one or two other notes known as vadi and samvadi. Specific rags also have associations with times of day, seasons, moods etc. There are around 250 rags in Indian music.

The Indian Notation System (Sargam)

Most Indian music is contained within three octaves. Notes of the scale are given names, with the 'tonic' called SA. Like Tonic Sol-Fa, this is movable, and in Indian music SA is set so as to suit the range of the performer.



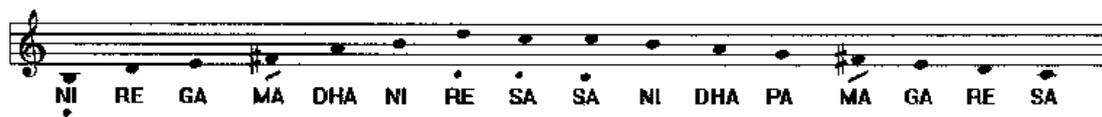
A dot above the name = octave higher

A dot below the name = octave lower

MA is sometimes sharpened, and this is indicated by a dash written above MA
 RE, GA, DHA and NI are sometimes flattened, and this is shown by them being underlined
 SA and PA are never altered.

Rag Yaman

This rag is associated with early evening, with a peaceful settled feel. The particularly significant notes (other than the tonic SA) are GA and NI. Notice that the ascent and descent patterns are different.



Below are certain characteristic melodic fingerprints in Rag Yaman.



Tal (or Tala)

Main Instrument: Tabla Drums

A tal (pronounced ‘taal’) is a rhythmic cycle that constantly repeats, coming back to the first beat. This first beat is called the sum, and is an important moment where all the musicians come together, even if they are improvising complex patterns for the rest of the cycle – pieces always end on the sum. Tals are split into sections called vibhags. Indian musicians ‘keep’ tal by clapping on the first beat of most sections. In every tal there is at least one section which is in contrast to the rest, where the musicians make a ‘wave’ rather than a clap (turning the hand palm upwards), and where the tabla (drum) player will play only on the smaller (right hand) drum. This section is called the khali vibhag.

Tintal

Tintal (pronounced ‘teentaal’) is the most popular tal. It has 16 beats divided into 4 sections (vibhags). Bols are words used to help learn the different strokes on the tabla (drums).

X = Clap, O = Wave

Clap- etc	X				X				O				X			
Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Bols	dha	dhin	dhin	dha	dha	dhin	dhin	dha	dha	tin	tin	ta	ta	dhin	dhin	dha

The tabla player has two drums – the right hand drum is smaller and higher-pitched. There is a round black patch in roughly the centre of each drum called the duggi. The following are some stroke patterns (although details vary in different areas):

- dha = LH strikes left drum with 2nd and 3rd fingertips
RH strikes the rim of the right drum with 2nd finger
- dhin = LH strikes left drum with 2nd and 3rd fingertips
RH strikes the right drum with a brushing motion between the rim and the duggi
- tin = RH strikes the right drum with a brushing motion between the rim and the duggi
- ta = RH strikes the duggi of the right drum firmly with 2nd and 3rd fingertips

Drone

Main Instrument: Tanpura

A drone is heard in the background of most Indian music. It basically consists of two separate notes (the tonic SA, maybe in octaves, plus usually the note a 5th above) played continuously. The drone never speeds up, but stays as an unchanging element throughout the piece.



Gat

This is a set composition within a rag that fits with a specific rhythmic cycle (tal – see below). This example is a gat in Rag Yaman that fits with the particular rhythmic cycle known as tintal (see below). Note that it starts on the 5th beat of the cycle (start of the second section or vibhag). Notice that the important notes in Rag Yaman (GA and NI) are prominent at the start of each section. The X represents a clap and the O a wave within the tal structure.

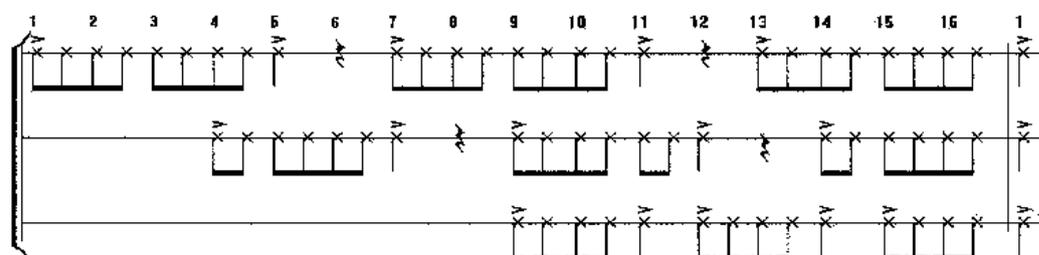
Tihais

A tihais is like a rhythmic cadence, and is used to end an improvised section or as the climax to a performance. In essence it consists of an identical rhythmic pattern played three times ending on

Gat in Rag Yaman and Tintal

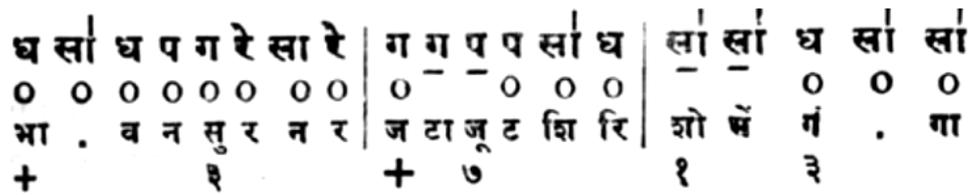


the first beat of a tal cycle. Here are three possible rhythmic patterns for tihais:



The secret is to work out which beat of the tal cycle you need to start on in order to finish up on beat 1 (the sum).

Indian Music Notation System (Sagram)



For example, in modern times, raga, the classical music of northern India, employs a notation system called sargam, which names seven basic pitches of a major scale.

Performing Indian Music in the Classroom

Instruments

Finding suitable classroom substitutes for Indian instruments is not easy. Remember that it is possible to pitch rags in any 'key' – choosing either C or D as the tonic Sa, for example, may make life easier for particular instruments in particular rags.

The solo part that would be played by sitar or sarod (called here the 'melody' line), can be played by any string instrument (including guitar), possibly woodwind and/or electronic keyboard set to a string (or flute) sound. The pitch wheel/pitch bend on keyboards or electric guitars can be used to imitate the characteristic slides of Indian melodic instruments.

The drone part is conventionally played on the tanpura or harmonium (introduced to India by missionaries in the c.19). The drone usually consists of the tonic Sa and the note a fifth above it. This can be reproduced in the classroom with keyboards, string instruments (eg cello/viola open strings), guitar/bass guitar (the guitar is particularly suitable if you choose the note 'D' as the tonic SA, and tune the lowest string down one tone).

The tabla drum part can be played on any two hand drums (if possible the right hand drum should be smaller and higher pitched). Glockenspiels, xylophones and clapping can also be used to keep the beats and stresses of the tala (ie play the claps and mark the waves in the tal).

Musical Materials

You need to choose:

- A particular rag, and its associated melodic shapes
- Drone notes (usually the tonic Sa and the note a 5th above)
- A tal (tintal is by far the most common)
- A gat, based on the chosen Rag and also suitable to fit within the chosen tal
- Possibly a *Tihais* to end the piece.

You could choose suitable material and give it to a class as a basis for performance, or they could invent a piece based on an original rag, tal and gat as a composition project.

Structure

There is a set formal structure to 'classical' instrumental music in North India. The following is a simplified version of the structure. Note that the drone is played throughout, and doesn't speed up even when the other instruments do. The melody instrument will only use the notes of the rag.

Stage One: Alap (pronounced 'Arlaap')

The 'melody' player improvises around the notes of the rag in an exploratory, non-rhythmical way, making use of the characteristic phrases of the rag and gradually expanding from a narrow to a wide range of notes (although most Indian music stays within three octaves). It is important to remember that some rags have different shapes ascending and descending.

Stage Two: Jor (plus Jhalla)

The improvisation now takes on a regular pulse as the music picks up momentum slightly. This is called jor. The melody instrument eventually starts to play these pulses in groups of four, perhaps mixing key notes from the raga with the 'tonic' note (the Sa, or main drone note), and the music becomes more rhythmic:



The 'C' represents the drone note and the other notes are from the rag, forming characteristic shapes specific to the rag. This is easy on a sitar, as some of the strings are tuned as melody strings, while others are tuned to the drone. In the classroom you could split this between two instruments. This section (with the feel of having a regular pattern) is called jhalla, a name also used for the final section (see below).

Stage Three: Gat

The tabla drums now enter, playing a specific tal time cycle. The sitar player plays the gat (formal composition based on the rag), which fits in at a specified place within the tal. The sitar player then plays variations based around the gat, lasting maybe 4, 8 or 12 bars, but always coming back to the original on the first beat of the tal cycle (known as the sum).

Stage Four: Jhalla

The music speeds up (although the drone does not alter) with dialogue between melody and tabla as each takes it in turn to improvise a complex rhythm which the other has to try and imitate exactly, always starting and ending on the first beat of the tal cycle (the sum). The instrument that is not improvising holds the tal rhythm in its basic form. It is also common for the melody player to play rhythmic patterns involving the main rag notes alternating with drone notes in a manner similar to the type of jhalla described in stage two above:



The piece ends with a rhythmic cadence (tihais) played by melody and tabla together – a phrase repeated three times ending on the first beat of the tal (the sum). The melody player plays the tihais using appropriate notes from the rag.

Rags & Drones

Here is a selection of rags, together with appropriate drone notes.

Rag Bhimpalāsari with Sa = C Drone = C & G

Rag Bhimpalāsari with Sa = D Drone = D & A

Rag Bhopali with Sa = C Drone = C & G

Rag Bhopali with Sa = D Drone = D & A

Rag Malkauns with Sa = D Drone = D & A

Rag Malkauns with Sa = E Drone = E & B

Rag Malakosh with Sa = B Drone = B & E

Rag Yaman with tonic (Sa) = C Drone = C & G

Rag Bhairav with Sa = C Drone = C & G

Rag Bhairav with Sa = D Drone = D & A

Rag Bhimpalāsari with Sa = C Drone = C & G

Rag Bhimpalāsari with Sa = D Drone = D & A

Rag Bhopali with Sa = C Drone = C & G

Rag Bhopali with Sa = D Drone = D & A

Rag Malkauns with Sa = D Drone = D & A

Rag Malkauns with Sa = E Drone = E & B

Rag Malakosh with Sa = B Drone = B & E

Drone patterns for Sa = C, D and E

Tals

You can use any tal with any rag, although the gat (fixed composition) will be different depending on the tal chosen.

Remember: X = Clap, O = Wave

Tintal (16 beats)

Clap-etc	X				X				O				X			
Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Bols	dh	dhi	dhi	dh	dh	dhi	dhi	dh	dh	ti	ti	ta	ta	dhi	dhi	dh
	a	n	n	a	a	n	n	a	a	n	n			n	n	a

Dipchandi Tal (14 beats)

Clap-etc	X			X				O			X			
Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Bols	dha	dhin	--	dha	dha	tin	--	ta	tin	--	dha	dha	dhin	--

Note that this tal has gaps on some of the beats

Jhaptal (10 beats)

Clap-etc	X		X			O		X		
Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Bols	dhin	na	dhin	dhin	na	tin	na	dhin	dhin	na

Key to drum strokes (Bols)

- dha = LH strikes left drum with 2nd and 3rd fingertips
- RH strikes the rim of the right drum with 2nd finger
- dhin = LH strikes left drum with 2nd and 3rd fingertips
- RH strikes the right drum with a brushing motion between the rim and the duggi
- tin = RH strikes the right drum with a brushing motion between the rim and the duggi
- ta = RH strikes the duggi of the right drum firmly with 2nd and 3rd fingertips
- na = RH strikes the rim of the right drum with the second finger

Gats

These 'fixed compositions' are unique to specific tal and rag combinations, and can be composed by using notes from the rag in such a way that they fit in with the tal. Here are two examples in which, characteristically, the gat does not start on the first beat of the tal. In both cases the tonic (Sa) is 'C'.

Gat in Rag Yaman and Tintal

Gat in Rag Bhimpalāsari (Sa = C) and Tintal

Tihais

These rhythmic cadences can be performed in many different ways. The essence is that it is a pattern played three times that ends on beat one of the tal. Three examples:

Musical Instruments

String Instruments

Tat vad (Plucked String Instruments)

Tat vad consists of those stringed instruments which are played by fingers directly or with a plectrum, e.g., tanpura, veena, sitar, rabab, sarod and santoor.



Hammered String Instruments



Vitat vad consists of bowed string instruments e.g., Sarangi, Dilruba, Belabahaar, Citra Vina and Esraj.



Wind Instruments (Sushir vad)

This covers instruments in which notes are produced by air columns such as

Flutes

Bansari, Shenai, Mukhaveena



Reed Instruments

Pungi



Keyboard Instruments

Harmonium



Percussion Instruments

Avanad vad (leather or percussion instruments)

These are percussion instruments which produce sound when dried animal skins, tightened by leather braces or cotton straps are struck. Mostly such instruments are used for producing tals (rhythms) and that is why some people call them tal vad. This category includes mridangam, tabla, pakhawaj, dholak, nagara, dhadh, kanjira, and damru.



Ghan vad (Idiophones)

These are idiophones of self-sounding instruments which combine the properties of vibrator and resonator. Some of them are struck together as cymbals, clappers and khartal, while some are struck singly as bells, gong, chimta (a pair of tongs) and jaltarang (cups of water producing different notes). Some are shaken like rattles and manjira. These instruments are made of wood or metal or both. In addition there are earthen pots like matka or ghatam. Some of these instruments are useful for rhythm only, e.g., manjira, jhanjh, and khartal, Matka, Ghatam.

