

PLAYING TECHNIQUES OF VEENA & SITAR – “ A COMPARATIVE STUDY”

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Abstract

One of the foremost concert instruments of the south “The Vina”. It has risen to greater heights than ever before purely just as the playing technique has advanced. Sitar in Hindustani Music on the other hand has a more or less similar structure and technique of handling as that of the south Indian Vina. Postures and other in-depth study of both these instruments are seen in many articles (like construction, Banis etc). The right and the left-hand techniques are very important for both these instruments. Coordination between the two hands plays a major role in bringing out the soothing melody through the instruments.

In this article, we are going to see the playing techniques of both the instrument and how there are similarities and differences in the styles of playing but is completely different when it comes to handling the instrument individually.

INTRODUCTION

Sitar and veena both are stringed instruments of India. Even though both instrument look alike, in construction including the big resonating sound box or gourd and the long neck (dhandi) which is hollow, there is a difference in the tuning and playing methods respectively.

Veena

An ancient instrument marked its existence from the pioneer of yazh, then and evolved to what is now called the veena, saraswathi veena, raghunatha veena etc. under the plucked string instrument category this instrument has its unique establishment in the way it has been handled. There are several variations in making the veena and the person who's adept in the playing of this instrument is called a vainika. Veena being a complex instrument, has varied styles of playing that include;

1. *How frequently meetu is done (plucking of string)*
2. *Importance given to saahitya meetu or swaram meetu*
3. *Gamakas (deflecting the strings to bring out the aesthetics in playing the instrument)*
4. *Adherence to tradition*
5. *Strength of the meetu*
6. *Technical adaptations of hands.*

Based on these techniques there are various styles or Banis broadly categorized as following.

- a. Tanjore Bani
- b. Karaikudi Bani
- c. Mysore Bani
- d. Kerala Bani
- e. Andhra Bani
- f. Balachander Bani

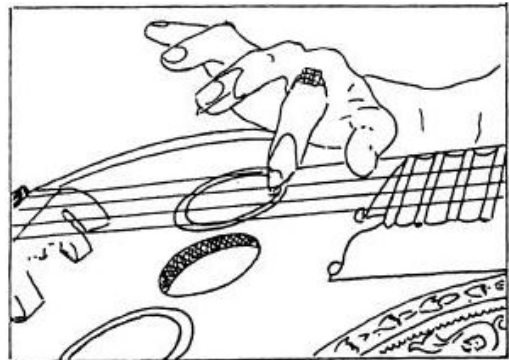
PLAYING TECHNIQUE OF A VINA

Playing the vina in with the use of right palm resting on the main resonator helps the fingers that are free to pluck the stings between the bridge and the frets. This plucking method is called "Meetu". The thumb finger can either rest on the resonator or let loose depending upon the

performer's convenience. Alternative usage of right Forefinger and Middle finger is done for the Meetu or plucking of the string. Since this instrument has both rhythm and melody

string in it, the little finger of the right is used in an upward direction from the bottom for strumming to give a continuous chime for the melody played at the required intervals. Hence it's said that this is the only instrument that sounds Sruthi and Laya together. It's also mentioned that the right hand should be kept like a hood of the snake and a perfect harmony of forefinger middle finger and little finger is a must to maintain continuity.

The movement of finger is downward and it's believed that the forefinger and the middle finger acts simultaneously relieving the middle finger.



For the meetu or plucking the tip of the finger is used or a metal extension called plectrum or meeti is used. This plectrum is common in both vina and sitar but the wearing on finger differs respectively. The swara Sol-fa syllables have a different meetu where every syllable is plucked whereas the plucking in the saahityam covers more than one note as it's used in places where syllables occur. Hence the use of plectrum or artificial nails helps to enhance the loudness upon the choice of the player.

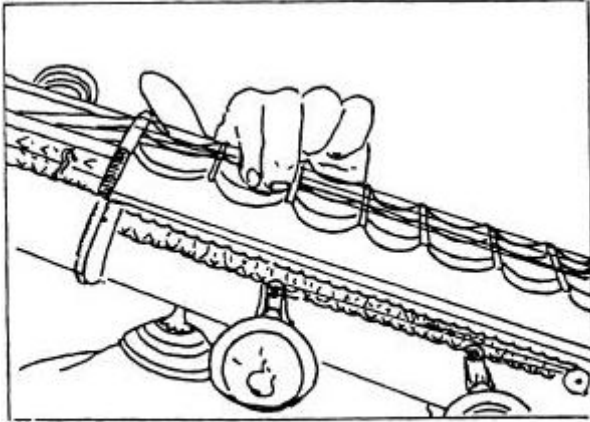
This plectrum is common for the two instruments but the way it's used for plucking differs for them respectively as mentioned before.



LEFT HAND TECHNIQUE:

While the right hand defines the sound production through the strings, the right hand is used to bring out the desired notes pertaining to the limitation of that particular raga. We use the forefinger and the middle finger as well which is the most important when it comes to usage of left hand. Plucking of strings and fingering the frets are a complimentary action when it comes to vina and sitar. Meetu and gamakas cannot be treated as separate items of technique. Possibilities of left hand techniques are innumerable when it comes to playing this instrument.

The basic step is the glide from one note to another which is done in two techniques or schools. Some schools have joint two finger technique and another has split finger technique.



One important aspect of the left hand is the deflection of strings; letting the vina implement the gayaki or the singing style which is related to gamakas. The curved surface or the scalloped surface on each fret of the wax allows the scope of pulling of strings. A minimum of three to four notes can be reached in pulling of the string which in turn brings the aspect of raga swarupa the way it's being sung. Hence this gives

continuity in the music presented. The right amount of pressure is very important to produce the real 'Naadha' of veena. A sensitive ear deft finger and creative mind can evolve many fingering techniques to produce music created by the mind on the veena.

SITAR

The Sitar is one of the most popular melody instruments in classic North Indian musical tradition. Together with the surbahar and the tanpura, it belongs to the family of the long-necked lutes. Its sound box is made of a pumpkin while the sound board and neck are made of timber (most common is toon wood, an Indian subspecies of teak wood). Two curved bridges made of bone or horn (or plastic nowadays) have steel and bronze strings running over them. The frets are tied movable to the neck and are made of nickel silver. Most sitars are decorated with inlays of celluloid and lavish carvings.

Modern Sitars can be classified into two categories according to

1. Structure
2. Design and set up

RAVI SHANKAR STYLE SITAR/KHARAJ PANCHAM

Instruments in the 'Ravi Shankar style', also called kharaj pancham sitars, have two sound boxes and rich ornamentation. They are usually equipped with 13 sympathetic strings, three drone strings (chikari) and four melody strings with a range of four octaves.

VILAYAT KHAN STYLE SITAR / GANDHARA PANCHAM

Sitars in the 'Vilayat Khan style', also called gandhar pancham sitars, have only one sound-box and a rather chaste ornamentation. They are mostly equipped with 11 sympathetic strings, four drone strings (chikari) and two melody strings with a range of three octaves.

PLAYING TECHNIQUES IN SITAR

Understanding the traditional playing styles of the sitar is important to comprehend the controllers in capturing the hand gestures. There are two main styles of sitar techniques as they define the playing styles which are 'Ustad Vilayat Khan' system & 'Pandit Ravishankar' system. The former has melodies performed in the higher octave hence eliminating the lowest string for the instrument, and Pandit Ravishankars system has more range, consequently giving scope for lower octaves to be used.

For both the vina and sitar the performer need to sit on the floor with a cross legged position. The instrument position being held varies within the two. On the sitar the melodies are performed mainly on the outer ring making the usage of the copper string rare.

For playing on the sitar, the left hand's usage of the index finger and middle finger to press the fret for hitting the desired swara or the note. The frets in this instrument are elliptically curved hence the downward deflection of string unlike that of the veena where we have inward deflection is seen in this instrument, to bend to a higher note.

RIGHT HAND TECHNIQUES

Just like the vina the performer wears a mizrab or plectrum on the index finger. The thumb finger is placed on the side of the instrument for grip and support. The movement of plucking is upwards and downwards when it comes to this instrument and is based on 'Bol & Gats'. Bols are syllables used in sitar playing that are rhythmic in nature and this makes it important as it the base of music. Gats are the rhythmic patterns with respect to Bols bound to Tala. Hence adhering to the rhythmic patterns a composition is composed.

The plucking of string in the upward direction is said to be 'DA', downward to be 'RA' and plucking of strings successively up and down with fraction of second intervals is called 'DIR'. One more Bol that is being introduced now in recent time is 'DRA' that is half the time taken to play 'DIR'.



The entire right hand gets pulled up and down over the seven strings letting the mizrab strum the desired melody. The differences that we can get are over a detailed study of the types of gamakas that can clearly differentiate the two instruments. Various gamakas that are in both the forms of music defines the uniqueness of the respective instruments.

CONCLUSIONS

With this I can come to an understanding that even though the two stringed instruments are widely getting popularized, each has its own technique and beauty in playing techniques. Both have similarities in plectrum and fret deflection but in its own ways respectively. Sitting postures crossed legged on the floor is one common thing but holding the instrument and posture of instruments held by the performer differs based on schools or banis' or systems of practice. The

definition of difference in relevance to technique can be more specific in the gamaka study between the two forms Carnatic Music and Hindustani Music.

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