

REFERENCES TO MUSIC IN TRADITIONAL ANCIENT SANSKRIT TEXTS

Dr. C.P.S. MADHURI

Academic Consultant, Department of Performing Arts, SV University, Tirupati, India

Introduction

India is a country with unity in diversity. This unity transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language and sect. Among the factors that account for this unique type of unity is the use of Sanskrit as a cultural link language. We can find several references to Music in various ancient Sanskrit texts. The present paper is to highlight a few musical references available in some selected traditional ancient Sanskrit texts which are helpful in identifying our cultural and traditional strengths and form the base in tracing the history and evolution of Indian Classical Music.

Music in Indian Context

India is a land of Spirituality and Philosophy. These two factors play a vital role in all aspects of human lives; culture and heritage not being an exception. Indian music has been characterized by religious flavour and spiritual fervor. In the Indian context, music was always considered a subject worthy of reverence. Indian music had tread on hitherto unsurpassed realms of the human and had tried to reach the Divine. It is a spiritual upliftment which takes us to the higher echelons of devotion. Indian music is not just about ragas and scales, it is also about path for god realization and to attain moksha. Nadopasana is the ideal path to achieve Moksha.

Gītīgānēnayōgasyātyōgādēvaśivaikyātā

gītījñyōyadyōgēnasayātīparamēśvaram || (Suta Samhita)

Vīṇāvādanatatvajñyaśrutijātivīsārada

tālajñyaścāprayāsēnamōkṣamārgaṃsagacchati || (Yajnyavalkya Smriti)

One who is well versed in playing Vina with its principles understood well and who has expertise in sruti and jati with the knowledge of tala, can attain Moksha without much effort.

During the ancient period, music was sacred and religious in nature. It was used for religious worship and was associated with temple worship and rituals. Music was treated as an applied art and considered as most sacred in form.

Sanskrit and Music

Indian classical music has an unbroken and an accumulated heritage of centuries that has been traced back to the Vedic Sanskrit period. It is believed that Indian music has its Divine origin in the Vedas. Thus, ancient sacred Sanskrit scriptures like the four Vedas, the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Sikshas, the Pratisakhya are all sources of Indian music with the Samaveda being the fountainhead from which music flowed.

Music in Traditional and Divine Perspective

References to music and dance are seen in the Vedas, the earliest Indian literature and also the earliest documents available to trace the history of Music and Dance in India.

Sāmavēdādidamgītamsaṅgrāhapitamahaḥ (Sangita Ratnakara)

Lord Brahma created the art of music from the Samaveda. Various musicological texts like Natya Sastra, Sangita Makaranda, Brihaddesi, SangitaRatnakara, Svaramelakalanidhi, Ragavibodha, Chaturdandi Prakasika, etc, are lay testimony to the musical heritage originated from the Samaveda.

According to Hindu tradition, music and gods have always been identified with each other. They are always depicted with various musical instruments. Lord Siva is the embodiment of *nada*, playing *Damaru* and also the performer of *Tandava-the cosmic dance*. Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, is always associated with the *Vina*, Lord Krishna, the flutist, also claims that he is the *Samaveda* among the Vedas.

Vēdānāmsāmavēdōsmi (Bhagavadgita, Chapter 10.22)

Goddess Parvati is the embodiment of *Lasya*, Lord Vishnu plays on the percussion, while his consort Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth is a connoisseur of music. Sage Narada is always depicted with his *Tanpura* and is also known as *Vainika-gayaka*. Nandi, the bull, is the master of *laya*. Almost all the demi-gods like the gandharvas, the yakshas and the kinnaras are believed to be proficient in music and musical instruments. This affiliation of music and musical instruments with gods and demi-gods is quoted in the musical treatises as follows.

*Gītēnaprīyatēdēvaḥsarvajñāhpārvatīpatiḥ
gōpīpatiranantōpivaśadhvanivaśamgataḥ
sāmagītiratōbrahmāvīṇāsaktāsarasvatī
kimanyēyakṣagandharvadēvadānavamānavāḥ|| (SangitaRatnakara)
Brahmātāḷadharōhariścapaṭahivīṇākārībhāratī
vanśajñauśāśibhāskarauśṛtidharāḥsid'dhāpsarakinnarāḥ
nandībhṛṅgiriḷādīmadaladharāḥsaṅgītakōṅāradaḥ
śambhōrṅṛttakarasyamaṅgaḷātānōrṅṅāṅsadāpātunah||
(Narada, Sangita Makaranda, Sangitadhyaya, Prathamapada)*

Thus music is divine and is called *nada* and is synonymous with God. There has always been a perfect unison of *nada* with *Paramatma* (*supreme power*) and in this unison one can find the “Transcendental Power”- *nadopasana*

References to Music in the Vedas

The beginning of music as well as music literature can be traced back to the Vedic hymns. The hymns were recited to propitiate the gods. The literature in the Veda is divided into 4 parts—the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharvana Veda.

The Rig Veda is the most ancient. The recitation of the Rig Veda at the beginning was done in monotone, and later developed to include up to three tones: Udatta, Anudatta and Svarita. In addition to the basic svaras used in reciting the hymns, various instruments were also used as accompaniments. Some of the Instruments are Dundubhi, Bheri, Bahura, Panava etc., The Rig veda mentions that 10 kinds of veena were used during the recitation of the Samavedic hymns. Some of the Veenas are Pichola, Akadi, Kapi, Sirshani, Karkatika, Sailaveena, Mahaveena, Khandaveena, Vaanam etc.,

The seven Vedic Tones, *prathama*, *dvitiya*, *trtiya*, *chaturtha*, *mandra*, *atisvarya* and *krusta* evolved earlier in the Vedic society.

Rigvedic hymns served as a guideline for tracing the evolution of many musical forms.

In Krishna Yajurveda, it has been mentioned that where the *marjaliya* fire used to burn, all the servant-girls used to dance rhythmically around the fire, carrying the water pitchers.

Udakumbhānadhīnidhāyadāsyōmārjālīyamparinṛtyanti.....

(KrishnaYajurVedam, 7.5.10)

In the Sama Veda, we can trace the real origin of the Indian Music. The Samagana, used to be sung with different tones, which evolved in a gradual process from one to seven, thus creating different strata like *archika*, *gathika*, *samika*, *svarantara*, *audava*, *shadava* and *sampurna*. The first scale of seven notes, used to chant the Sama Veda become the first Raga, and according to present day musicologists, it corresponds to Kharaharapriya Raga of the Carnatic musical system. The Sama Veda is more music oriented of all the four Vedas.

References to Music in Pratisakhya

The Pratisakhya contain very valuable references to music prevalent in ancient times. Three notes were used for reciting the hymns termed as Udatta, Anudatta, and Svarita.

Uccairudāttahñīcairanudāttahsamāhārahsvaritaḥ (Taittiriya Pratisakhya)

The Rik – Pratisakhya refers to the three octaves and these seven svaras, the Saptaka. The Pratisakhya speak of 5 svaras, such as Udatta, Anudatta, Svarita, Pracheya and Sannatara. Svaras of two types such as Mridu (soft) and Tikshana (sharp) which later on became komal and tivra variety, and the 3 sthayies or vocal registers like Mandra, Madhya and Tara are described.

Trīṇīmtraimadhyamuttamaṁ ca sthānasyāhuḥsaptayāmāḥ

7 yamas allotted for rendering hymns, the time suitable to render them, are also discussed.

References in the Brahmanas

The Brahmanas are sacred hymns in Sanskrit dealing with rites and duties to be performed while performing sacred sacrifices.

In *Samavidhana Brahmana*, earliest description of svaras and their usage in singing vedic hymns are mentioned. Different musical instruments like Vakra, Alabu, Vina, Tambala, Sankha, Naali, Tunava, Vana Aghati, Adambara, Karkari etc., are described in various Brahmanas.

In *Taittiriya Brahmana*, we find reference to vina played by a member of royal family while performing Aswamedhayaga, and the priests or Brahmanas singing before the king.

Yēśvamēdhēnayajatēbrāhmaṇauvīṇāgādhiṇaugāyataḥ

śriyāvāyētadrūpamnyadvīṇāśriyamēvāsmintad'dhataḥ

(Taittiriya Brahmana, III.9)

In the Kaushitaki Brahmana, it has been stated that the arts of dancing, singing, and playing the musical instruments formed an important part of certain Vedic rites.

Trivṛddhauśilpaṁṛtyaṁgītāṁvādītramiti... (Kaushitaki Brahmana, 29.5)

References in the Upanishads

The primordial sound “Om” is considered to be the Adharasvara of all music.

ŌmkāraprabhavādēvāŌmkāraprabhavāsvarāḥ

Ōmkāraprabhavaṁsarvaṁtrailōkyāṁsacarācaram||

Ōmkāram ca parabrahmāyāvādōmkārasambhavaḥ

Akārōkāramākārayētēsāṅgītasambhavāḥ||

The Chandogya Upanishad refers to Omkara, the Pranava Nada, as the essence of the world.

Yēśāmbhūtānāmṛthivīrasaḥ, ṛthivīpōrasaḥ,

āpāmōśadhīyōrasaḥ, ośadhīnāmpuruṣōrasaḥ,

puruṣasyavāgrasaḥ, vacaruḥgrasaḥ,

rucasāmarasaḥ, sāmnauḍgīthōrasaḥ (Chandogya Upanishad)

The essence all beings is the earth; the essence of earth is water; the essence of water is plants; the essence of plants is human; the essence of a human is speech; the essence of speech is the Rig Veda; the essence of the Rig Veda is the Sama Veda; the essence of the Sama Veda is the Udgitha which is Om.

yaḥpraṇavaḥsaudgīthaḥ

(Chandogya Upanishad)

This Omkaram is the Udgitha- that which is sung is the Samagana.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad, Suta and Sailusha are referred as professional musicians and dancers. Ganaka was an adept in sruti, svara and tala; Tunavadana was accompanist in Tunava; Panisanghada, timekeeper; veenavada- adept in vina play and so on. References to instruments like Dundubhi, Tunava, Vina etc., are also found.

In the NaradaParivrajaka Upanishad, we can find references to the solfa syllables – sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da and ni.

Athakadācitparivrājakābharaṇōṅnāradaḥsarvalōkasañcāram...

Naimiśāraṇyāmpuṇyasthalamavalōkyasarigamapadhanisa

sañjñairvairāgyabōdhakaraiḥsvaraṇiśaiḥ....(NaradaParivrajaka Upanishad)

References in the Sikshas

Sikshas form a group of sacred literature which represent the highly developed nature of music. The most important Sikshas are NaradiSiksha, PanineeyaSiksha and YajnavalkyaSiksha. All the three Sikshas deal with the origin, nature and relationship of svaras and history of music. Naradiyasiksha connects the seven svaras of the Sama gana with the seven svaras of classical music.

Yassāmagānāmprathamassavēṇōrmadhyamassmṛtaḥ

yōsaudvitīyōgāndhārastrīyastvṛvṣabhassmṛtaḥ

caturthaṣṣaḍjaityāhuhpañcamōdhaivatōbhavēt

ṣaṣṭhōniṣādōvijñēyassaptamaḥpañcamassmṛtaḥ (Naradiyasiksha)

NaradiyaSiksha describes association of svaras with birds, animals and nature as follows

Ṣaḍjamvadatimayūrōgāvōrambhanticarṣabham

ajāvīkētugāndhāramkrauñcōvadatimadhyamam

puspasādḥāraṇēkālēkōkilōvaktipañcamam

aśvastudhaivatamvaktiniṣādamvaktikuñjaraḥ

The Yajnavalkyasiksha speaks of the three primary notes, Udatta, Anudatta and Svarita.

Udāttaścānudāttaścāsvaritascatahaiva tat

lakṣaṇamvarṇayīsyāmidavataṁsthānamēvaca(yajnyavalkyasiksha)

Gāndharvavēdēyēprōktāḥsaptaṣaḍjādayaḥsvaraḥ||(Y.S)

PaniniyaSiksha thus describes the sources of svaras

Udāttaścānudāttaścāsvaritaścāsvarāstrayaḥ

hrasvōdīrghaḥplutaitikālatōniyamāci

udāttēniṣādagāndhārāvanudāttaṣṣabhadaivatau

svaritaprabhavāhyōtēṣaḍjamadhyamapañcamāḥ||(PaniniyaSiksha)

References in the Aranyakas

Aranyakas which come as conclusion to Brahmanas are appendices given at the end of the Vedas. Many references to music can be found in these Aranyakas.

Aitereya Aranyaka mainly deals with the origin of Nada or Dhvani, svara, vina and various musical instruments. Vina and its varieties are discussed exclusively in a chapter, such as Daiva Vina

(God made), Manushika (man-made). Daiva vina is considered to be the human being itself. The head is the gourd bowl which will be supported by the shoulders, stomach is resonator, tongue- the face, and fingers constitute the strings.

References in Puranas

The Puranic age was characterized by highly devotional and sacred music. Puranas are believed to have been compiled by Sage Vyasa and comprised of Mahapuranas and Upapuranas. The major Puranas are Vayu Purana, Matsya Purana, Markandeya Purana, Vishnudharmottara Purana, Linga Purana, Brihaddharma Purana etc.,

Vayu Purana deals with music as Gandharvam. Svaras are referred to in Svaramandalam. Here saptasvaras, 3 gramas, 21 murchanas, 49 tanas, 30 geetaalankaras, 14 alankaras, 4 varnas are discussed in detail. Various compositions mentioned are Aparantaka, Ullopyaka, Madraka, Riggatha, Paanika, Dakshavishita, etc., 10 murchanas are listed under Gandharagrama. A list of 15 ragas coming under Gandharagrama are also mentioned. The Vayu Purana also gives description of dance and its varieties.

In the Brahmavaivarta Purana, the Rasa dance of Gopis, clapping of their hands to the rhythmic accompaniment of mridangam and vina are described. The Matsya Purana deals with basic concepts such as Gita, Sruti, Svara, alankara, grama, murchana, tana etc., Also various dance forms and aspects of abhinaya such as Angika, Vachika, Aahaarya and Saattvika, 8 rasas are explained.

In the Markandeya Purana, dealing with the story of Markandeya - the ardent devotee of lord Siva, the 21st chapter deals with music. It talks about the basic concepts of music.

*Saptasvarāḥgrāmarāgāḥsaptapannagasattamam |
gītakāni ca saptaivatāvatyāścāpimūrchanāḥ ||
tānaścaikōnapañcāsattathāgrāmatrayam ca yat |
ētatsarvēbhavānvēttakambalaścaivatēanagha ||
caturvidhamparamtālamtriprakāramlayatrayam |
gītatrāyamtathākālammayādattamcaturvidham ||* (Slokas 52-54)

The BrihaddharmaPurana describes Nada, its origin and its placing in the body such as Nabhi. Hruth, Kantha, Mukha etc., 22 sruties, saptasvaras, Ragas and Raginees are referred to. The Ragas mentioned are Kanada, Vasanta, Mallara, Vibhasaka, Gandhara and Deepaka.

The VishnudharmottaraPurana stresses the importance of music and dance. Chapters 18 &19 here deal with music. In the Chapter 18 called GitaLakshna - Svaras, Gramas and Ragas of each of the three Gramas, three Vrittis, Vadi, Samvadi and Anuvadi, nine Rasas and Svaras of each Rasa, the three layas and the laya of each Rasa, ten Jatis, four Alamkaras, Prasannadi, Prasannanta, Prasannadyanta, Prasannamadhya and several kinds of songs Aparantaka, Ullopyaka, Mandraka, Makari, Ovenaka, Sarobindu, Ruggaatha etc. are mentioned. There is also mention of 49 tanas with their names. This is evident from the following slokas-

*Athagītalakṣaṇabhavati –
tasyatrīṇīsthānāni - urukaṇṭhaśiraścatēbhyōmandramadhyatārōtpatti |
trayōgrāmā - ṣaḍjamadhyamagāndhārā |saptasvarā - ṣaḍjarṣabhagāndhāra
madhyamapancamadhaivataniṣādavantā|ēkavinśatimūrchanā - saptasaptapratigrāmāsritā,
tadyathāāsānāmāni - sauvirī, hariṇāśvā, kalōpanatā, śuddhamadhyamā, mārgī, pauravī,
hṛṣyākā ca ētāsaptamadhyamagrāmīṇya |Uttaramandrā, rajanī, uttarāyatā, śuddhaṣaḍjā,
matsarīkṛtā, āsvakrāntā, udgatā ca ētāsaptāṣaḍjagrāmikā | ālāpā, kuntimā, śuddhā, uttarā,
ṣaḍjā, panncāyatā, udgatā ca ētāsaptagāndhāragrāmikā || Grahāmsastāramandrē ca*

nyāsōsāpanyāsaēva ca | alpatvaṁca bahutvaṁca śāḍavōḍavitētathā ||
Ēvamēvabudhairñēyājātayōdaśalakṣaṇā | alaṅkāṛāścacatvārōbhavantivasudhādhipa ||
prasannādiprasannāntaprasannādyantaēva ca |
prasannamadhyāscatathākramēṇaivavinirdiśēt ||

Athātōdyavidhānam-

caturvidhamātōdya - tata suṣiraghanamavanaddhanmca |
tatāmvinādi, suṣiravanśādi, ghanatālādi, avanaddha murajādi ||

In the Linga Purana, the first three chapters deal with the basic concepts of music. Susvarata and vidhi jnana (knowledge of correct rendering of svaras) are described as essential qualities for good music. It also says that Narada learned music from the owl called Ganabandhu. The different permutation and combination of svaras and different modes of singing are also dealt with.

References in Epics-The Ramayana and The Mahabharata

The art of music and dance attained high status and distinction during the epic period. There are innumerable references to music in the Ramayana. References to murchana, varna, alankara, tana, sthaya and other musical materials can be found in the Great Epic of the Ramayana. Sage Valmiki describes that the wandering bards – Lava and Kusha were well-versed in the art and science of the Gandharva type of music. This is evident from the following verses of the Ramayana and also gives an account of the status of music during that period.

Kuśalavautudharmajñaurājaputrauyaśasvinau
bhrātarausvarasampannaudadarśaśramavāsinaḥ || (1.4.5)

The residents of the Ashrama looked at Kusa and lava, those radiant princes who were well versed in dharma and had rich tuneful voices.

Pāthyēgēyē ca madhurampramāṇaiḥtribhirānvitam
jātibhiḥsaptabhiryuktaṁtantrīlayasamanvitam
..... Rasairyuktamkāvyamētadgāyatham || (1.4.7)

(Their performance of the Ramayana) was pleasant both when sung and when recited, it was endowed with the three measures – the vilamba, Madhya and drutalaya, the seven jatis of tone and sung to the laya of a string instrument.

Tautugāndharvatattvajñāusthānamūrchanakōvidau
Bhrātarausvarasampannaugāndharvavivarūpinam || (1.4.10)

Those two brothers, versed in the gandharva tattva – musical lore, were experts in the knowledge of sthanas and their murchanas; those sweet-voiced ones also resembled gandharvas in appearance.

Tatastu tau rāmavacaḥpracōditau | agāyatām mārḡavidhānasampadā.... || (1.4.36)

Then those two, encouraged by Rama, sang in the rich Marga style. Valmiki describes the work of Ramayana as something sweet to the ears on being read or heard. We also get reference to various technical terms like Atodya, Gana, Geya, Laya, Pramana, Rasa, Sthana, Tantri, Vadya, Tala, Avanaddha, Vina, Vipanchi, Venu, Sankha, Turya, Bheri, Dindima, Dundhubhi, Mridanga, Muraja, Panava, Pataha, Ghanta etc., comprising of stringed, wind, percussion and metallic instruments.

Like Ramayana, Mahabharata also contains valuable information about the theory of music. It stated that the sound has been described as the quality (guna) of the ether (akasha), and even the seven laukika tones like shadja, rishabha etc., have been described as the attributes of the ether.

*Tatraikagunaākāśahśabdaityēvasasmṛtaḥ
tasyaśabdasyavakṣyāmivistārēṇavahunguṇān
ṣaḍjarṣabhagāndhārōmadhyamahpañcamahsmṛtaḥ
ataḥparamtuvijñēyōniṣādōdhaivatatasthā*

..... Śabdaākāśasambhavaḥ || (ashvamedhikaparva, 53.52-54)

Mahabharata used the term Gandharva instead of Sangeeta. The epic therefore referred to a more specific kind of music. Music is considered as the surest and easiest means to attain salvation. Arjuna, in the role of Brihannala, taught dance to Uttara. He was an ideal dance master. In Bhagavadgita, Lord Krishna advises Arjuna in the style of the Saman chants. Conch is associated with Lord Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima (Panchajanya, Devadatta and Paundra). Many martial instruments are described such as Bheri, Sankha, Panava, Pataha, Gomukha etc.,

Conclusion

Thus we find many references to music in our tradition with particular reference to ancient Sanskrit texts, which form the base to trace the history and evolution of Classical Music of India.

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