

## MODERN DAY INTERPRETATION OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC TRACES IN RAMAYAN & MAHABHARAT ERA

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### Abstract

India is a country which has a wide range of eras in its history before it got independence in the year 1947. The eras included Vedic Era, Ramayan Era, Mahabharat Era, Jainism Era, Buddhism Era, Maurya Era, Gupta Era, Mughal Era and European Era. This research focuses on the condition of Indian Classical Music during Ramayan and Mahabharat eras of Indian History and its modern interpretation.

The research analyses both the literature development and practical development of Indian Classical Music in both the aforementioned eras. The literature development focuses on the noted musicologists and books written by them on music in those eras. The literature by various musicologists analyses the development *Swaras*, *Mels*, *Raags* and classification among them. The practical development focuses on the condition of Indian Classical Music in both the eras. It also puts light on discovery and growth of new musical instruments in that era.

The purpose of this research is to provide an insight towards the overall state of Indian Classical music in the aforementioned eras and give a modern interpretation of the classic techniques and instruments which were in use during those eras.

### INTRODUCTION:

India has witnessed a lot of eras in its history before it achieved its independence in 1947. It has also served as a host to many invading visitors all over the world. The eras include Vedic Era, Ramayan Era, Mahabharat Era, Jainism Era, Buddhism Era, Maurya Era, Gupta Era, Mughal Era, European Era, etc.

In those eras and periods of invasions, music has witnessed a lot of growth and development, both in terms of theoretical and practical aspects. The following points can give a fair share of the development of music in any specified era:

- The music literature & musicologists of that era.
- The defining of musical grammar in that era.
- The development of various performing styles in that era.
- The development of musical instruments in that era.

This research aims to put limelight on the growth and development of Indian Classical Music

in *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* eras and compares the classic techniques and instruments used in those eras with modern counterparts.

### MATERIALS & METHODS:

There were 3 books from which materials were collected. Those were *Sangeet Ratnavali* by Ashok Kumar Yaman, *Bharatiya Sangeet Shashtra* by Tulsiram Devangan and *Bharatiya Sangeet ek aitihaasik vishleshan* by Prof. Swatantra Sharma. Methodologies used were both Descriptive and Analytical.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Growth of classical music was analyzed and noted carefully in each era in terms of music literature or performing style or variety of instruments used or performing artists of that era.

It was observed that many traces of modern day Indian Classical Music techniques and grammar were used in both Ramayan and Mahabharat eras. A comparative study of classic techniques in those eras and modern day techniques was made. The results also

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included the comparison of ancient instruments used in those eras with modern day equivalent instruments.

### RAMAYAN ERA:

The Ramayan Era in India was from 600BC to 300BC. It was written by Sage Valmiki. It was based on the adventure of Lord Rama to get his wife Goddess Sita who was abducted by demon Raavana.

The Ramayan is deemed as one of the earliest literature in the cultural history of India. It is also noteworthy that Ramayan was also one of the earliest lyrical epics. The origin of literature of Ramayan is believed to be from Sage Valmiki who was having bath in *Tamasa* River along with disciple *Bharadwaj* and had his first lyrical *Sloka*[1].

There is also evidence of the use of the word 'Gandharva' in the epic *Ramayan*. *Gandharvas* were the celestial male musicians. Together with '*Apasaras*' (female dancers), the *Gandharvas* represented the musicians in the *Devlok* (heaven). Among the '*Dev-Gandharvas*', some names were very popular such as *Haha, Huhu, Narad, Tumaru and Viswasu*[2]. In the Ramayan period, Marg-sangeet had a very high status. While describing the characteristics of Marg-sangeet, it has been said that the one which is used in front of the gods and which is aimed towards '*Moksh Prapti*', is Marg-sangeet. During Ramayan era, both *Sam Gaan* and *Gandharva Gaan* were popular.

There is also mention of the word *Jaati*, which came from each *swaras* such as "*Sadji*", '*Arshavi*', '*Gandhari*', etc. The word '*Pramaan*' indicated Rhythm. Hence the word '*Tripramaan*' represented three different rhythms – *Vilambit, Madhya & Drut*. The rhythm was given by hand (clapping), *Ghan vadya* (metal based percussion instruments) and *Avanaddhh vadya* (skin based percussion instruments). Expanding the swara by showing the state of *Graha, Ansh, Mandra, Taar*, minority, multiplicity etc. was simply called '*Aalap*'. When the aalap is rhythmic, it is called '*vartani*' or '*vartini*'. When the aalap was done in *Drut laya* (fast tempo), it is called '*karan*'.

In Ramayan four types of instruments were used. Those were *Tatt Vadya* (String instrument), *Avanaddhh Vadya* (skin based percussion instruments), *Sushir Vadya* (wind based instruments) and *Ghan Vadya* (metal based percussion instruments). *Tatt Vadya* included *Veena, Vipanchi and Vallaki* etc. and all types of dhol related instruments like *Bheri, Dundubhi, Mridang, Patah, Manduk, Dindim, Panav, Muraj, Kumbh, Chelika* are included under *Avanaddhh vadya*. *Sushir vadya* included *Venu* (Flute) and *Shankh* (Conch) and *Ghan Vadya* included *Kartaal, manjire* (cymbals) and *Pani vadaks*[3]. In Ramayana, the word '*Pani vadak*' represents those who gave beats with hands. *Swastika, Kartal* etc. were used to show rhythm. Even during this period, *Veena* had a very important place among

string instruments. Multiple methods of playing *Veena* are also described in the music of Ramayana period. *Swastikas* and percussionists were also marching ahead in Ram's royal procession after his return from exile.

Guru-Shishya parampara was the only way of imparting knowledge. *Lav-Kush's* guru was *Acharya Valmiki*. The society looked at these guru-disciples with respect. They used to practice classical music or *Gandharva*. There was also another class of singers, instrumentalists and dancers in the society, who were invited to *yagyas*, entertainment acts and '*samaj*' and seminars. On the basis of the above evidence, the position of musicians in Ramayana can be considered respectable. Music performed in the classical style was not considered inferior. From the literature of this period, it comes to light that perhaps the religious aspect was more respected in the music field by the elite section of the society.

### Analysis of condition of Indian Classical Music in Ramayan Era:

- Music Literature & Musicologists during Ramayan Era:
  - Sage *Valmiki*
- Defining of musical grammar during Ramayan Era:
  - *Graha, Ansh, Alpatva, Bahutva* terms were defined.
  - When the *Alaap* used to be '*laya baddh*', it was told as '*vartini*' and when '*vartini*' was done in fast *laya*, it was referred to as '*karan*'[4].
  - Along with the 3 notes -*Udatta (High), Anudatta (Low) & Svarita (Middle)*, a 4<sup>th</sup> note *Kampit (Middle with vibrato)* was sung.
  - *Jaatis* and *Murchhanas* were defined with more clarity.
  - 6 *Alankars* were used-*Ucch, Dipt, Mandra, Nich, Drut, Vilambit*. [5]
  - Different types of '*Sam*' were in use such as *Akshar Sam, Ang Sam, Taal Sam, Yati Sam, Nyas Sam, Upanyas Sam, Pani Sam*. [6]
- Music performing styles during Ramayan Era:
  - Apart from *Sama Gaan, Gandharv Gaan* was also an established performing style of music. *Lav & Kush, Shishyas* of Sage *Valmiki* performed *Gandhrav Gaan* with proper use of elements like *Swar, Shruti, Jaati, Taal, Laya, Murchhana, Gram, Vaadan* [7]. A particular Raag named "*Kaushik*" was popular at that time [8].
- Music Instruments during Ramayan Era:
  - 3 types of instrument were defined in Ramayan Era – *Sushir* (Wind instrument),

Tat(String instrument) & Ghan(Percussion instrument).

- Vipanchi (String instrument like Veena), Vana or Vallaki(Harp), Mrudanga, Madukka, Pataha, Dundubhi, Muraja, Dindima (variations of percussion instruments), Turhi & Shankh(variations of wind instruments).

**Table 1: Modern Day Interpretations of Classic Techniques used in Ramayan Era**

Subject	Ramayan Era	Modern Era
Alaap Laya	Alaaps were done in different <i>layas</i> : <i>Vartini</i> (Slow), <i>Karan</i> (Fast)	Alaaps/ <i>Vistaars</i> are done in <i>Vilambit</i> (Slow) <i>laya</i> . For fast <i>laya</i> <i>Taans</i> are in use now.
Saptaks	<i>Anudatta</i> (Low), <i>Svarita</i> (Middle), <i>Udatta</i> (High)	<i>Mandra</i> (Low), <i>Madhya</i> (Middle), <i>Taar</i> (High)
Vibrato	<i>Kampit Swar</i>	<i>Kaaku</i>
Guru Shishya Parampara	Shishyas (disciples) used to stay at Ashram/Gurukul with their Gurus (Teachers) and learn music as well as life lessons.	There are very rare Gurukuls now a days. Today, mostly a teacher goes to student house to impart knowledge through tuitions.
Popular Performing Styles	<i>Saam gaan</i> , <i>Gandharva gaan</i>	<i>Khayal</i> , <i>Dhrupad</i>

**MODERN DAY EQUIVALENTS OF SOME INSTRUMENTS USED IN RAMAYAN ERA: STRING INSTRUMENT**

**Figure 1: VIPANCHI (FROM RAMAYAN ERA)**



**Figure 2: VEENA (MODERN ERA EQUIVALENT)**



**PERCUSSION INSTRUMENT**

**Figure 3: PATAH (FROM RAMAYAN ERA)**



**Figure 4: DHOLAK (MODERN ERA EQUIVALENT)**



**MAHABHARAT ERA:**

According to Thakur Jayadev, it can be broadly said that Mahabharat era can be ranged from 1000 BC to 500 BC [9]. Mahabharat is an epic based on battle between two forces led by *Pandavas* and *Kauravas* who were actually cousins. The epic war, which took place in *Kurukshetra* (near Ambala) was led through a series of mini battles and finally aimed to conquer the throne of *Hastinapur* (near Meerut). The author of this epic is Sage Vyas. The Guru-disciple tradition was continuing even during that period. The experts of skilled dance and songs were called ‘Gandharva’. These Gandharvas were musicians and it was due to them, that music education was spread.

Music was not looked down upon during this period. It was promoted in all sections. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and many such castes were surrounded by music. Even the Gods were always immersed in music. A father did not hesitate in marrying his daughter to a musician, but there are some instances where music has been criticized. Particularly street musicians were not given social prestige. Even today, those who earn their living by dancing and singing on the streets are looked down upon. Therefore, it is natural to lack respect for this type of music and musicians.

The performing styles were not only limited to *Sam Gaan* & *Gandharva Gaan*. Music was encouraged in all social activities like birth ceremonies, war preparations, victory ceremonies and even death ceremonies. As a mark of starting the day, early morning soothing music was played to wake up the society [10].

7 *Swaras* and different *grams* were in use. Apart from *Shadaj* and *Madhyam gram*, *Gandhar gram* also became popular in this era. However, the order of *swaras* was different. The *Aaroha* was in the order of

Sa->Re->Ga->Ma->Pa->Ni->Dha whereas the Avaroha was in the order of Ma->Ga->Re->Sa->Dha->Ni->Pa [11].

In this era, there was use of different 'Angs' from Vedic education like *Swar, Pada, Stom*, etc. *Saam Gana* was used in were *yagyans* like *Agnistom Yagyan, Rajasuya Yagyan, Bajapeya Yagyan*, etc [12].

All the instruments which were there in the Ramayana period are also found in the Mahabharata period. The instruments which have been mentioned separately in the Mahabharata are the following - *Bheri, Turya, Varij, Panav* and *Kansya* etc. '*Turya*' represents an ancient form of Trumpet. '*Varij*' is an ancient form of conch. '*Kansya*' is a metal percussion instrument made of bronze. *Bheri* and *Panav* were big leather based percussion instruments, which were played to encourage the warriors in the army. *Jharjhari* can be considered similar to an instrument called cymbal. Along with the song, there is also mention of musical instruments like *Panav, Vansh* and *Bronze Tal* being played simultaneously. *Veena* playing has always been done along with singing on *Yagya* ceremonies. *Veena* is mentioned as the most important instrument during this period. *Veena* is considered integral to the singing and playing styles of the classical tradition. *Veena* was considered so auspicious and sacred that it was included in rituals like deity and brahmin worship. There were "*Sangeetshalas*" and "*Nrityashalas*" which were places where disciples would come by the daytime, learn and go home by night.

### Analysis of growth of Indian Classical Music in Mahabharat Era:

- Music Literature & Musicologists during Mahabharat Era:
  - Sage Ved Vyas, Krushnachandra, Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*.
- Defining of musical grammar during Mahabharat Era:
  - 7 *Swaras* and different grams were in use. However the order of swaras was different. The Aaroha was in the order of Sa->Re->Ga->Ma->Pa->Ni->Dha. The Avaroha was in the order of Ma->Ga->Re->Sa->Dha->Ni->Pa.
  - *Angs* from *Vedic Shikshya* like *Swar, Pada, Stom* were in use.
  - Four 'Gandharva' (celestial singers) were most popular – *Atibahu, Haha, Huhu & Tumberu*.
  - *Nrityashala & SangeetShala* concepts were introduced- disciples used to go to them in day, learn and return by night.
- Music performing styles during Mahabharat Era:
  - Gandharv Gaan was most popular performing style of music. *Guru-Shishya Parampara*

was the main style of learning music. *Samuhik Gaan, Samuhik Vadan*, were also practiced. The concept of music performance on auspicious and ominous occasions was introduced- there was music for birth as well as death ceremonies. Early morning, *Madhur Geet* concept was introduced to wake everyone up.

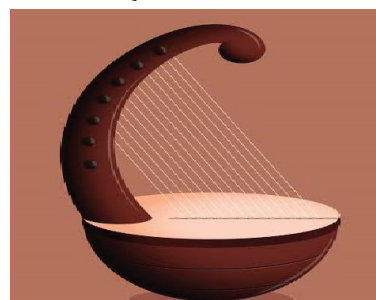
- Music Instruments during Mahabharat Era:
  - 3 types of instrument were defined in Mahabharat Era – *Sushir* (Wind instrument), *Tat*(String instrument) & *Ghan*(percussion instrument). *Veena* (String instrument), *Vallaki* (harp) *Bheri, Kansya, Jhanjhari* (variations of percussion instruments), *Vanshi, Turhi & Varij*(variations of wind instruments).

**Table 2: Modern Day Interpretations of Classic Techniques used in Mahabharat Era**

Subject	Mahabharat Era	Modern Era
<i>Svara order</i>	<i>Aaroha :</i> <i>Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Ni</i> <i>Dha</i> <i>Avaroha:</i> <i>Ma Ga Re Sa Dha Ni</i> <i>Pa</i>	<i>Aaroha :</i> <i>Sa Re Ga Ma Pa</i> <i>Dha Ni</i> <i>Avaroha:</i> <i>Sa Ni Dha Pa Ma</i> <i>Ga Re</i>
Musical Occasions	Death ceremony and Birth ceremony were marked with musical performances starting from this era.	This tradition follows till date.
Guru Shishya Parampara	<i>Shishyas</i> (disciples) used to stay at <i>Gurukul</i> with their <i>Gurus</i> (Teachers) and learn music as well as life lessons. There were <i>Sangeetshaalas</i> and <i>Nrityashaalas</i> too.	There are very rare <i>Gurukuls</i> now days. Today, mostly a teacher goes to student house to impart knowledge through tuitions.
Popular Performing Styles	<i>Saam gaan,</i> <i>Gandharva gaan</i>	<i>Khayal, Dhrupad</i>

### MODERN DAY EQUIVALENTS OF SOME INSTRUMENTS USED IN MAHABHARAT ERA: STRING INSTRUMENT

**Figure 5: VALLAKI (FROM MAHABHARAT ERA)**



**Figure 6: YAZH (MODERN DAY EQUIVALENT)**



#### **WIND INSTRUMENT**

**Figure 7: TURHI (FROM MAHABHARAT ERA)**



**Figure 8: TRUMPET (MODERN DAY EQUIVALENT)**



#### **METAL PERCUSSION INSTRUMENT**

**Figure 9: KANSYA (FROM MAHABHARAT ERA)**



**Figure 10: GHANTA (MODERN DAY EQUIVALENT)**



#### **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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