

Classical Music of India

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The classical music of India is based upon musical structures or concepts known as “raga”s.

The classical music of India is mainly melodic in character; it is not common to use harmony.

The names of the musical notes, known as “svara”s, are the following:

sa	S	shadja
re	R	rishabh
ga	G	gandhar
ma	M	madhyam
pa	P	pancham
dha	D	dhaivat
ni	N	nishad

The notes listed above are known as the “shuddha svara”s (pure notes).

The seven shuddha svaras are comparable to the notes do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, and si in Western music.

An octave, known as a “saptak”, spans the seven shuddha svaras: S R G M P D N.

The flat or soft versions of notes are known as “komal svara”s and are represented by underlined versions of their symbols: R, G, D, and N.

The sharp version of the fourth note is known as “tivra madhyam” and written as M’.

An octave includes the pure and altered notes: S R R G G M M’ P D D N N.

The pitch or frequency of the fundamental note S is flexible: a singer or performer may choose a convenient reference pitch.

The relative positions of some of the notes are flexible, and could vary with ragas.

A note in the lower octave (“mandra saptak”) is written with a dot beneath its symbol:
Ṁ Ṁ Ṁ Ṁ Ṁ Ṁ Ṁ Ṁ.

A note in the higher octave (“tar saptak”) is written with a dot above its symbol: Ṡ Ṡ Ṡ Ṡ Ṡ Ṡ Ṡ Ṡ.

Each raga uses a particular set of notes along with specific rules of movement.

The characteristic upscale and downscale movements of a raga are known as “aroh” and “avaroh”.

The dominant note and the second important note of a raga are known as the “vadi” and “samvadi”.

The notes that are not permitted in a raga are known as the “varjit svara”s.

Groups of notes or musical phrases that characterize the typical movements of a raga are known as “pakad” (catch phrases).

To create continuity, melodic transitions known as “gamaka” are used from one note to the next.

Each raga possesses certain characteristic feelings or emotions (“rasa” or “bhava”); the musician attempts to convey such sentiments to the audience.

Each raga is associated with a certain period of the day, a particular season, and specific sentiments.

The consonance and dissonance between the pure notes and the altered notes (komal or tivra) used in a raga form the basis of the association of a raga with time and mood.

Examples of ragas:

Vibhas (a raga associated with sunrise, serious, devotional, meditative):

aroh S R G P D P Ś ; avaroh Ś D P, G P D P, G R, S

Bhairav (a raga associated with early morning, devotional, contemplative, forceful):

S R G M P D N Ś ; Ś N D P M G R S

Bhoopali Todi (a raga associated with day time, serious, sad): S R G P D Ś ; Ś D P G, R G R S

Shuddha Sarang (a raga associated with the afternoon period, slow, lethargic):

Ṇ S R M' P N Ś ; Ś N D P, M' P, R M R, S Ṇ S

Puriya (a raga associated with sunset, serious, contemplative, profound):

Ṇ R G M' D N Ś ; Ś N D M' G R S, Ṇ R S

Bhoopali ou Bhoop (a raga associated with the night, light, joyous): S R G P D Ś ; Ś D P G R S

Yaman (a raga associated with the night, pleasant, versatile):

Ṇ R G M' D N Ś ; Ś N D P M' G R S, Ṇ R S

Shiva Ranjini (a raga associated with late night, serious, sad): S R G P D Ś ; Ś D P G R S

Darbari Kanada (a raga associated with midnight, majestic):

Ḍ Ṇ S R G, M P D, N Ś ; Ś D N P, M P N G, M, R, S

Megha Malhar (a raga associated with the rainy season or night, joyous, pleasant):

\underline{N} S R M P \underline{N} \acute{S} ; \acute{S} \underline{N} P M R S \underline{N} S

Hindol (a raga associated with spring or day time, sensual):

S G M' D N D \acute{S} ; \acute{S} N D M' G M' G S N \grave{D} S

Bahar (a raga associated with spring or midnight and renewal):

S M, M P, \underline{G} M \underline{N} D, N \acute{S} ; \acute{R} N \acute{S} , D \underline{N} P, M P, \underline{G} M R S

Basant (a raga associated with spring or night, light and joyful):

S G M' \underline{D} \acute{R} \acute{S} ; \acute{R} N \underline{D} P, M' G M' \underline{D} , M' G \underline{R} S

At the beginning of a presentation, the musician develops a slow and elaborate exposition of the selected raga, without any accompanying rhythm or lyrics, known as “alap”, to express the essential characteristics of the raga.

A basic composition in the Hindusthani tradition of classical music may contain only four or five lines of lyrics or specified musical phrases.

The musician embellishes the basic composition with spontaneous musical expressions, passages, and phrases, and improvisation.

Each presentation of a given raga or composition would be different due to the spontaneous improvisation and original development in real time.

The improvisation and development of a raga with original elements in the form of an elaborate presentation are essential features of the classical music of India.

Rhythm is an essential component of the classical music of India.

The rhythmic patterns used, known as “tal”s, are cyclical; they are not linear in time.

The primary tempo in a rhythm is known as “laya”; the basic unit of time is known as the “matra”.

The laya of a tal could be “vilambit” (slow), “madhya” (medium), or “dhrut” (fast); the adjective “ati” (very) may also be used.

The various sounds of the tabla are represented by syllables known as “bol”s.

The basic bol pattern of a tal is known as the “teka”, which may be embellished with various patterns known as “kayada”, “mukhada”, “rela”, “peshkar”, and “tihai”.

The strike of a syllable may be right on the corresponding beat (“sama”), before the beat (“anagata”), or after the beat (“atita”).

Some of the commonly used rhythmic (cyclical) patterns are the following:

Teen tal (16 = 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 beats per cycle), Ek tal (12 = 3 + 3 + 3 + 3),

Jhap tal (10 = 2 + 3 + 2 + 3), Kaharava (8 = 4 + 4), Roopak tal (7 = 3 + 2 + 2), Dadra (6 = 3 + 3).

Teka of Teen tal (16): ^xdha dhin dhin dha dha dhin dhin dha ^odha tin tin ta na dhin dhin dha

(^x): the first or dominant beat of the cycle, known as “sam”;

(^o): the beat that commences the second part of the cycle, known as “khali”.

Teka of Ek tal (12): ^xdhin dhin na tirakita tin na ^okat tin na tirakita dhin na

Teka of Kaharava (8): ^xdha gue na ka ^ona ka dhi na

Teka of Roopak tal (7): ^xti ti na ^odhi na dhi na

Example of a composition in the raga Bhinna Shadja in roopak tal and elaboration with “tans”:

^x 1	2	3	^o 4	5	6	7
^x Ś	N	D	^o G	M	D	N
^x Ś	N	D	^o G	M	G	S
^x G	M	DN	^o Ś	N	DN	D

Each note or group of notes within a cell of the table corresponds to the interval of one beat (matra).

^x 1	2	3	^o 4	5	6	7
^x Ś	N	D	^o G	M	D	N
^x Ś	N	D	^o GM	DN	ŚN	DN
^x Ś	N	D	^o ŚN	DM	GM	GS
^x Ś	N	D	^o NS	GM	SG	MD
^x GM	DN	MD	^o Ś	MD	Ś	MD
^x Ś	N	D	^o G	M	D	N

Elaboration with tans.

Improvisation and originality in the elaboration of a composition form the essence of the music of India.

The principal objective of a musician is to communicate to the audience the mood of the raga and the sentiments or feelings associated with the composition.

A musical composition is typically developed in a slow, elaborate, and structured manner to create an experience that is serene and pleasant to the audience and the musician.

I thank Utpal Mazumdar for his contributions to the development of this article.

For a more detailed article on the Classical Music of India and MP3 files of a few ragas, visit http://members.shaw.ca/raj_rangayyan/