

Classical Music of India, Evolution, Hindustani, Carnatic Music

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Indian classical music, also known as *Marg Sangeet* or *Shastriya Sangeet*, refers to the traditional music system based on strict rules of **Raga (melody)** and **Tala (rhythm)**. Its origins can be traced back to ancient texts like the **Natyashastra** by **Bharata Muni**. Over time, Indian classical music evolved into two major traditions: Hindustani Classical Music (North India) and Carnatic Classical Music (South India).

Classical Music of India Evolution

Indian classical music evolved over thousands of years, beginning with Vedic chants and gradually developing into a sophisticated system of **Raga and Tala**. Influenced by religion, royal patronage, and cultural exchanges, it eventually divided into Hindustani and Carnatic traditions.

Vedic Period (Ancient Origins)

- The roots lie in the **Samaveda**, where hymns were chanted in musical tones.
- Music was primarily devotional and used in religious rituals.

- Early concepts of **swara (notes)** and chanting styles developed.

Natyashastra Period (200 BCE - 200 CE)

- The *Natyashastra* by Bharata Muni formalized music theory.
- Introduced concepts like **rasa (emotion), raga, and tala**.
- Music became part of drama, dance, and performance arts.

Gupta & Early Medieval Period (4th-10th Century)

- Considered the “Golden Age” of Indian arts and music.
- Development of structured ragas and musical instruments like **Veena**.
- Music was patronized by temples and kings.

Medieval Period & Bhakti Movement (10th-15th Century)

- Rise of devotional music through saints like Mirabai and Tulsidas.
- Emergence of **Bhajans and Kirtans** focusing on devotion.
- Music became more accessible to common people.

Persian Influence & Mughal Era (13th-18th Century)

- Interaction with Persian culture led to evolution of **Hindustani music**.
- Introduction of new instruments (Sitar, Tabla) and styles.
- Contribution of Amir Khusrau in blending Indian and Persian music.
- Royal patronage under rulers like Akbar boosted classical music.

Division into Two Traditions

- Around the 14th century, Indian classical music split into:
 - **Hindustani Music (North India)** – influenced by Persian styles
 - **Carnatic Music (South India)** – remained closer to original traditions

Carnatic Music Development (16th-18th Century)

- Systematized by Purandara Dasa.
- Flourished under the **Trinity of Carnatic Music**: Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Syama Sastri.
- Strong emphasis on compositions and devotional themes.

Gharana System & Modern Era (18th Century onwards)

- Development of **Gharanas** in Hindustani music (e.g., Gwalior, Kirana).
- Music passed through **Guru-Shishya tradition**.
- Emergence of new forms like Khayal and Thumri.

Colonial & Post-Independence Period

- Decline of royal patronage but rise of public concerts and institutions.
- Efforts by musicians and scholars to preserve classical traditions.

- Recording technology helped spread music globally.

Hindustani Classical Music

Hindustani Classical Music is the traditional music system of North India, known for its emphasis on raga-based improvisation and melodic expression. It evolved from ancient traditions and was later enriched by Persian and Mughal influences, making it highly expressive and diverse.

Basic Concepts (Raga and Tala)

- Based on **Raga (melodic framework)** and **Tala (rhythmic cycle)**.
- Uses **Saptak (seven notes)**: Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni.
- Each raga is associated with a specific mood, time, and emotion.

Importance of Improvisation

- Gives artists freedom to creatively expand a raga.
- Includes **Alap (slow, non-rhythmic introduction)**.
- Followed by compositions with rhythm and tempo variations.

Main Vocal Styles

- **Dhrupad** – oldest, devotional and serious form
- **Khayal** – most popular, romantic and flexible
- **Tarana** – fast-paced, rhythmic syllables
- **Thumri** – semi-classical, emotional and lyrical

Gharana System

- Musical traditions passed through **Guru-Shishya parampara**.
- Each Gharana has a unique style of singing and interpretation.
- Famous Gharanas: Gwalior, Kirana, Agra, Patiala, Jaipur-Atrauli.

Role of Great Musicians

- Flourished under Mughal patronage, especially during Akbar's reign.
- Legendary musicians like Tansen contributed immensely.
- Amir Khusrau is credited with innovations in music.

Musical Forms and Compositions

- Bandish (fixed composition) is central in Khayal.
- Use of **Bada Khayal (slow)** and **Chhota Khayal (fast)**.
- Emphasis on melodic expansion and ornamentation (Alankar, Taan).

Instruments Used

- **Sitar, Sarod, Tabla, Sarangi, Santoor, Flute.**
- Tanpura provides continuous background drone.

Performance Structure

- Begins with **Alap** (slow introduction).
- Followed by **Jor and Jhala** (faster improvisations).
- Ends with composition in rhythm (with tabla accompaniment).

Gharana System in Hindustani Music

- The term “**Gharana**” is derived from the Hindi word *ghar*, meaning house, and signifies a musical family or school that follows a specific style and tradition in performance and teaching.
- The Gharana system developed prominently during the medieval period when musicians received patronage from royal courts, leading to the formation of distinct regional styles.
- It is deeply rooted in the **Guru-Shishya Parampara**, where disciples learn directly under a guru through years of dedicated training, ensuring the continuity of musical traditions.
- Each Gharana has its own characteristic way of presenting ragas, including variations in voice culture, note emphasis, improvisation techniques, and rhythmic patterns.
- The identity of a Gharana is often linked to a particular geographic region, such as Gwalior, Kirana, Agra, or Jaipur, reflecting local cultural influences.
- The system plays a crucial role in maintaining diversity in Hindustani classical music while still adhering to the fundamental principles of raga and tala.
- The differences between Gharanas are most evident in the treatment of swaras (notes), use of ornamentation (**alankar**), and the balance between melody (**swara**) and rhythm (**laya**).
- Prominent Gharanas include Gwalior, known for its simplicity; Kirana, famous for its melodic precision; Agra, which blends Dhrupad and Khayal styles; **Patiala**, known for fast taans; and **Jaipur-Atrauli**, recognized for complex ragas.
- Over time, the rigid boundaries of Gharanas have become more flexible, and modern musicians often incorporate elements from multiple Gharanas to create a blended style.
- Legendary musicians like **Bhimsen Joshi** and **Bade Ghulam Ali Khan** have played a significant role in popularizing their respective Gharanas globally.
- The Gharana system not only influences performance but also shapes the teaching methodology, aesthetic values, and interpretation of music.

Carnatic Classical Music

Carnatic Classical Music is the traditional music system of South India, known for its highly structured compositions and strong theoretical foundation. It emphasizes devotion, precision, and a systematic approach to **Raga (melody)** and **Tala (rhythm)**.

- Carnatic music is primarily practiced in the southern states of India including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, and is deeply rooted in temple and devotional traditions.
- It has a highly developed theoretical system based on **Ragam (melody)** and **Thalam (rhythm)**, which form the backbone of all compositions and performances.
- Unlike Hindustani music, Carnatic music gives more importance to **fixed compositions** rather than improvisation, though controlled improvisation is still an important element.

- **Purandara Dasa** is regarded as the father of Carnatic music as he systematized teaching methods and composed thousands of devotional songs.
- The modern form of Carnatic music was shaped in the 18th century by the Trinity, **Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar**, and **Syama Sastri**, who created numerous kritis.
- The basic structure of a Carnatic composition includes sections like **Pallavi, Anupallavi, and Charanam**, which together form a complete musical piece.
- A **Kriti** is the most important form of composition in Carnatic music, combining lyrics, melody, and rhythm in a highly refined manner.
- Carnatic performances usually begin with a **Varnam**, which serves as a warm-up piece and introduces the raga to the audience.
- Improvisational elements such as **Ragam, Tanam, and Pallavi** allow artists to creatively explore ragas within a structured framework.
- The system of **Melakarta ragas** classifies Carnatic ragas into 72 fundamental parent scales, providing a scientific basis for musical organization.
- Rhythm plays a crucial role, and complex tala patterns are maintained with precision using percussion instruments like the **mridangam**.
- Common instruments used in Carnatic music include **Veena, Mridangam, Violin, Flute, and Ghatam**, with a strong emphasis on vocal music.
- The language of compositions is often Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, or Kannada, reflecting the cultural diversity of South India.

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