

North Indian Classical Music in The Classroom.



A survival guide for Teachers
& Pupil projects

By
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Indian Classical Music.

Introduction.

What does Indian Classical Music have to offer?

I have began my introduction to this resource pack with this question as it was the first question I asked myself when confronted with the task of preparing a Scheme of Work for a Year 8 class on World Music. My prior knowledge of Indian Classical was non-existent and I felt daunted at the prospect of having to teach a subject which I had no association or ownership with.

Looking back on my own experiences as a learner, effective teaching has always come from teachers who have a commitment to the area of learning, some may call this a passion. I made it my goal to develop a solid base of knowledge in order to present the subject with commitment and hopefully the pupils would also feel a sense of ownership and value towards their learning.

To that end this resource pack is aimed a developing teacher awareness of what can appear to be a daunting area of music to teach. Through looking at existing resources and worksheets I have noticed that these draw upon the minimum of musical application from the teacher and tend not to encourage direct involvement with the music. My aim is to provide teachers with an accessible means of understanding Indian Music through various teaching styles as well as using this music to develop Listening, Composition and Appraisal Skills using Western crossover approaches.

Omar Khoker 2001

'...Life and death are not all and nothing, but stages in a process, episodes on an infinite river to which one trusts oneself and all other phenomena.'

So it is that Indian music reflects Indian life, having no predetermined beginning or end but flowing without interruption through the fingers of the **composer-performer**: the tuning of the instrument merges imperceptibly with the elaboration of the melody, which may spin itself out for two, three or more unbroken hours.

The two scales of the West, major and minor and the half-dozen ancient Greek modes are submerged in Indian music under a system of **ragas**. Even the rules of dodecaphonic composition have been anticipated; where the dodecaphonic system requires all twelve notes of the chromatic scale to be sounded on sequence and repetition is forbidden. The Indian *raga* chooses between five and eight notes, while the hundreds of *ragas* between them exploit all possible notes in permutations of subtlety and flexibility that can be scarcely conceived.

Melodically and rhythmically Indian music achieved a complexity that was only emulated in the twentieth century by the likes of Bartok and Stravinsky.

What Indian music has not and Western Music has is harmony. Harmony in Indian Music is underpinned through the use of **drone** which serves the purpose of a tonal epicentre even when the events existent around it drift off at seemingly unrelated tangents.

The simplicity of the drone is contrasted by the complexity of rhythm within Indian music. The 'typical' ensemble for Classical Indian Music is a trio, consisting of drone, melody and rhythm. The ensemble then chooses a **raga** and a **tala** on which to base their music. **Tala** is rhythm, the meter of Indian music includes our 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 and extends beyond using variants which we would class under the term '**additive rhythm**'. This term can be associated with Twentieth century such as Messiaen and Stravinsky the former of whom was richly influenced by Indian Music and Philosophy (e.g. Turangalila Symphony).

If for example a **tala** consisting of eleven beats is chosen the group will improvise in patterns of ten (for example ten 'choruses' of eleven beats to use jazz vocabulary). To make the performance relationship integral with the audience the audience beats the basic meter (e.g. 11/4) while the group improvises. This produces a '**minimal phasing effect**' in which the rhythmic patterns start close, separate and then converge (in this case at the 110th beat) usually resulting in cheers from the audience. 'Minimalist composers' such as Glass and Reich have adopted this 'phasing' effect.

"Through working with Ravi Shankar, I saw there was another way music could be organised, around rhythmic ideas instead of around structure. Rhythm could be the structural basis of the music instead of just an ornament".

(Philip Glass in interview on Conrad Rooks' film '*Chappaqua*'.)

As if the rhythm player's function was not already complicated enough, a contribution is also made to the melody. The **tabla**, a double Indian drum almost has a melodic function, the pressure of the player's hand on the drum skin alters the pitch inflection, which combine with intricate variations of attack and volume.

None of this music is notated instead relying on '**oral tradition**'. The oral tradition keeps the meaning and purpose of the music alive and accessible. As soon as an idea is confined to paper an 'interpreter' is required to unlock it (or 'break the code'). The Indian musician requires no intermediary; creativity is public and shared and the **performer-composer** keeps no literal record, each performance is an individual response to creative stimuli and should be regarded in such a respect.'

These notes have been adapted and from
'Thoughts on Indian Classical Music'
by Yehudi Menuhin (*'Unfinished Journey'*).

Indian Classical Music A History for Music Teachers.

- North and South.

Indian music can be traced back several millennia, and has been discussed in Sanskrit theoretical treatises (**shastras**) for around two thousand years. The earliest of these treatises, the **Natyashastra**, makes a connection between vocal music, instrumental music and dance. This has underpinned the definition and development of **sangeet** (the Indian term for classical music) ever since its writing.

The period of history most relevant to the music of today began around the sixteenth century when the main historical focus was the establishment of the Royal courts. North India had been ruled by Muslim sultans and emperors since the thirteenth century and had absorbed influences from the Muslim cultures from the west of India. This led to a merging of styles between the northern **Hindustani** and the southern **Carnatic** style. There are significant differences of repertoire, vocal techniques and instruments but the underlying principles of **raga** and **tala** (scale and rhythm) remain common.

Most of the music heard today is **Hindustani** in origin because the north area covers a larger area and population than the south. Ravi Shankar has promoted this area of music but there is no question of one style being superior to the other. Many of Ravi Shankar's experiments, which have become part and parcel of the modern Hindustani style are based on ideas from Carnatic music, and there are signs of a growing rapprochement between the two major styles of Indian classical music.

- Vocal Music.

Both Hindustani and Carnatic music have a great variety of vocal, instrumental and dance types. The oldest Hindustani vocal genre still performed today is **dhrupad**. It is a noble and revered style characterised by a sombre and devotional mood. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was gradually superseded by the more popular **khyal** style. Within this style the singer is allowed more freedom for vocal display and the mood is more secular and romantic. The names alone give a good indication of the difference: **dhrupad** means something like 'fixed composition' while **khyal** suggests 'flights of fancy'. Up until the middle of the twentieth century great khyal singers both male and female

dominated Hindustani music. During the previous century they had become classified according to **gharana**. This word, from **ghar** meaning 'house', denotes a musical tradition based on family and place. The **gharanas** sprang up in the courts and were expressions of a court's cultural prestige. For this reason they were secretive and competitive. The courts also developed instrumental music and dance though this fell into demise through the demand for open communication and public concerts.

This demand for open concerts threatened the traditional intensive teaching method from master to pupil known as "**guru-shishya parampara**", which was the whole fabric of the Indian oral tradition. The 'open tradition' was a standardised music where everyone sings or plays in the same way and is clearly undesirable. This does not appear to be happening, despite the universal availability of the most respected and fashionable, an independent successful career can only be built on a balance of tradition and individuality, imitation and innovation.

- **Genres of Vocal Music.**

Though vocal music is at the heart of Indian music (owing to the 'oral tradition' method of teaching) it is evident of its influence on instrumental music which is now especially popular and thriving. It is perhaps not surprising that this should be so outside the Indian subcontinent. As a general rule it is easier to access a foreign music through its instrumental music rather than its singing. One obvious reason is understanding the language of the texts. Ironically, should not be a problem for the **khyal**, where the poems tend to be brief and of no special merit or importance, the emphasis being on the development of the **raga** away from the poem. The related **tarana** is based on abstract syllables with no text at all (phonetic sounds that have a percussive and melodic effect). Other genres rely on the expression of words. **Thumri** is very popular at the end of a concert to create a lighter, romantic, yet obliquely devotional mood, typically developing words and associated sentiments addresses to the lover, or god as lover (Krishna). The most important Hindustani dance style known as **kathak**, also explores the expression of thumri and similar devotional songs through gesture. The genre of so-called light classical songs includes **dadra**, **kajri**, **ghazal** and **dhun**. Like the thumri they are usually performed at the end of a concert. They have romantic or devotional texts and are sometimes set to tunes that are reminiscent of folk music, if not actually taken from it.

Bhajan and **Qawali** songs have become widely accepted throughout the world. Both are essentially devotional songs, Hindu in the case of the **bajan** and Muslim in the case of **qawali**. They have been used in popular idioms such as films and pop songs, which has diluted some of their religious flavour. (See **Bhajan Vocal Activity**)

- **Instrumental Music.**

Since instruments almost always imitate the human voice, most of the genres encountered in vocal music can be played. Instrumental recitals share many of the features of **dhrupad** and **khyal**, though each instrument will also have its own style and repertoire based on its idiomatic techniques. The plucked stringed instruments such as the **vina**, **sitar** and **sarod** have been especially popular for a long time. Joining them is the **santoor**, which is a hammered dulcimer and is now a virtuoso instrument. In recent history of Indian Classical Music folk instruments have made their way among the more traditional classical instruments. These include the **sarangi** (a bowed instrument), **bansuri** (Indian folk flute) and the **shehnai** (like and oboe).

The **tabla** drums have long been established as the main accompanying instrument of **Hindustani** music, responsible for maintaining the **tala** rhythm. The different traditions of tabla playing, known as **baj** (sometimes also as **gharana**), go back to the eighteenth century. The greatest players developed an extensive solo repertoire and legends were born. If anything, the tabla has recently become the most popular Indian instrument. Its dazzling speed, exciting rhythms and highly characteristic sound is found on a considerable amount of Indian popular music as well as westernised Indian music (e.g. **Bhangra** and the music from of **Talvin Singh** and **Nitin Sawhney**)

- **The future...**

Despite the weight of tradition and the complaints of purists for whom the golden age is always the one that has just passed, Indian music is enjoying worldwide appreciation and respect. Artists are meeting the challenges of the modern world with its demands of fusion and the influence of technology. The old ragas are blended with new as well as western modes; Hindustani is fused with Carnatic, or with Western modern music and Jazz. This is moving to a music, which is 'World' in the

essence of being **global**. A contrast to 'World Music', which tended to focus on a single continent in isolation.

Indian Classical Music
A History for Music Teachers.
Glossary.

- **Baj** **A tabla playing style.**
- **Bansuri** **Indian Bamboo flute.**
- **Carnatic** **The Southern classical tradition.**
- **Dadra** **Light classical song.**
- **Dhrupad** **Ancient and revered vocal genre.**
- **Dhun** **Short piece in the style of folk music.**
- **Gharana** **Style of music related to particular cities and families.**
- **Ghazal** **Light classical song based on the Urdu poetic type of the same name.**
- **Gurushishya** **The tradition of handing down music orally from master to pupil.**
- **Hindustani** **The northern classical tradition.**
- **Jugalbandi** **Duet.**
- **Kajri** **Light classical or folk-derived song.**
- **Kathak** **The main type of Hindustani dance.**
- **Khyal** **The main genre of Hindustani vocal music.**
- **Pandit** **Learned man (Hindu).**
- **Qawwali** **Muslim (Sufi) devotional song.**

- **Raga** Melodic type of scale or mode, which is the basis of Indian classical music.
 - **Rasa** 'Sentiment'; the aesthetic basis of the Indian arts; nine rasas (nava rasa or navras) are commonly recognised.
 - **Sangeet** The nearest translation of "Classical Music", comprising of vocal music, instrumental music and dance.
 - **Santoor** Hammered dulcimer.
 - **Sarangi** Bowed stringed instrument.
 - **Sarod** Plucked unfretted stringed instrument.
 - **Shehnai** Indian Oboe or Shawm.
 - **Shastra** Musical treatise written in Sanskrit.
 - **Sitar** Plucked fretted string instrument.
 - **Tabla** Two small hand-beaten drums.
 - **Tala** Rhythmic cycle, commonly from six to sixteen beats.
 - **Tarana** Vocal genre often sung within a khyal performance.
 - **Thumri** Prominent light classical song of a romantic and devotional nature.
 - **Ustad** Master (Muslim).
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Indian Music.

Religious & Classical (History and Listening).

Once a King asked a Sage:

KI NG: O sinless One! Be good enough to teach me the methods of image-making.

SAGE: One who does not know the laws of painting can never understand the laws of image-making.

KI NG: Be then good enough, O Sage, to teach me the laws of painting.

SAGE: But it is difficult to understand the laws of painting without any knowledge of the technique of dancing.

KI NG: Kindly instruct me in the art of dancing.

SAGE: This is difficult to understand without a thorough knowledge of instrumental music.

KI NG: Teach me then, O Sage, the laws of instrumental music.

SAGE: But the laws of instrumental music cannot be learned without a deep knowledge of the art of vocal music.

KI NG: If vocal music be the source of all arts, reveal to me, then O Sage, the laws of vocal music

INDIAN TALE

Indian Religious Music.

Students Notes.

Most Indians follow their religion strictly. There are different places of worship to cater for the three different religions found in India.

- **Temples** by the Hindus.
- **Churches** by the Christians.
- **Mosques** by the Muslims.

Each religion has it's own special kind of music.

In the Hindu temples the most common form of music is the **Bhajan**. In this the congregation sings after a leader, sometimes accompanied by instrumentalists. The music begins slowly but gets faster and is repeated. This is called a **chant**. The Bhajan may be based on religious stories.

The Christians also sing Bhajans in their churches. The only difference is that the texts are about Christianity. The priest sings the main part, followed by the congregation singing the response. The Christian Bhajan is like the verse and response found in Christian services all over the world. Christians in India also sing Hymns common to Western Churches.

Indian Muslims have a special form of religious music called **Qawwali**, which is a combination of clapping, chanting and singing. The music is meant to rouse the congregation into a religious trance. Muslims also have regular religious chanting in their mosques. On Fridays the priest or **Imam** can be heard singing chants from the mosque in most Muslim countries.

Picture of a Hindu Temple.



Picture of a Moslem Mosque.



Questions.

1. Name the three main places of worship on India?
2. What is a Bhajan?
3. To which religion does Qwwali music belong?
4. What happens to the tempo (speed) of a Bhajan?

Indian Religious Music. Bhajan Project.

Here is one of the most popular Bhajans. It is sung at many Hindu religious gatherings even in the West. A western pop song was made out of the same tune and words in America and Britain in the 1970's. There are only two words '*Hari Krishna, Hari Rama*', which are the names of a Hindu God.

The Bajan is repeated many times depending on the enthusiasm of the priest and congregation.

It is usual for the chant to get faster ('Accelerando') as it is repeated.

Bhajan: 'Hari Krishna Hari Rama'.

Voice

Ha - ri Krish - na Ha - ri Krish - na Ha - ri

6
Krish - na Ha - ri ha - ri Ha - ri Ra - ma Ha - ri

12
Ra - ma Ha - ri Ra - ma Ha - ri ha - ri

Tasks

1. Sing the chant as a whole group to start...
2. Split into smaller groups and take it in turns to 'lead' getting faster ('accelerando'), try and make it gradual and smooth. Experiment by changing the volume ('dynamics').
3. Try setting the Bhajan in a 'Pop' style by changing or speeding up the rhythms. Try doing this and also add a rhythm section either using percussion or drum sounds on a keyboard.
4. The Bhajan also works as a 'Round' (like 'London's Burning'). Divide into two groups and try and work out when Group 2 would start singing to 'imitate' Group 1 for the 'Round' to work.

Indian Classical Music. Students Notes.

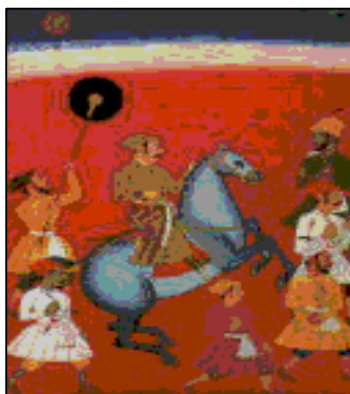
Indian Classical Music is one of the oldest forms of music in the world and dates back nearly 2000 years. The classical music of Northern and Southern India is not the same. South Indian music is even older than music from the North, and has developed in a different way. The Southern style of music is called **Carnatic**.

North Indian music is called **Hindustani** and developed from ancient religious chants. These later became influenced by Arabic music in the 11th century when Muslims invaded India. This was the beginning of North Indian classical music, as we know it today.

In the past, classical music flourished in the courts of Indian princes who were called **Maharajas**. The maharajas employed musicians and other artists (such as dancers, actors, storytellers, poets and painters). They lived in the maharajas' palaces and music was rarely heard outside the courts, so there was little contact between court music and any other kinds of music (such as Folk).

Classical Indian music remained pure and traditional for centuries because it was not influenced by other music. Each court had its family of musicians who specialised in a particular style of music. Each musical style was handed down by word of mouth from parent to child through several generations developing an **oral tradition** of teaching Indian music.

Picture of a Maharaja.



(Paintings like this would hang in the palaces.)

Questions.

1. How old is Indian Classical music?
2. How did Indian musicians earn their living in the past?
3. Where was classical music performed?
4. How was the musical teaching passed on?
5. What are the names given to the Northern and Southern styles of Indian Classical Music?

Listening to Indian Classical Music. The Four Main Elements.

There are four main elements to be aware of in Indian music.

These are :

- Drone.
 - Melody.
 - Rhythm.
 - Improvisation.
-

Drone.

Before you begin to listen for the other elements you need to be familiar with the drone. Indian music does not have harmony in the way Western music does. It relies on a sustained sound that is heard throughout the piece. The drone consists of only two notes that act as a foundation to the whole piece.

Melody.

The next element to listen for is the melody. The melody is improvised on a special selection of notes called a raga. Each piece is based on a specific raga, which the melody players explore and improvise on.

Rhythm.

As the piece develops rhythm is gradually added. This is called tala and is a basic rhythmic pattern or cycle. The tala is repeated many times in a similar way but the player gradually subdivides and throws the basic beats creating very complex patterns, rather like a jazz drummer.

Improvisation.

Since Indian music is not written down, musicians have to improvise (make up the music). But they have to improvise within a set of rules, which are based on the chosen raga and tala that the musicians have chosen to play.

In addition there are four main characteristic sections to the piece, which are:

- The 'Alap' Section.

This is the opening of the piece and often flows from the melody instruments being tuned to the drone notes. The pace is slow and relaxed as the player introduces and explores the raga by playing it in various ranges of the melody instrument but the player generally starts low to develop the relaxed and tranquil mood of this section.

- The 'Jor' Section.

This follows on from the 'Alap' section and the main distinction is the addition of a sense of rhythm. The melody gradually develops a pulse as the Tal is introduced with drumbeats. This is still within the relaxed mood of the 'Alap' though there is a feeling that the music has become a little faster.

- The 'Jhala' Section.

This is rather like a development section, which starts slow and builds up in speed. It contains the 'Gat' section, which is regarded as the climax of the piece. In the 'Gat' all the musicians are playing (drone, melody and rhythm) after having been introduced in the previous sections. The music starts slow and gradually becomes very fast and exciting often with the audience cheering.

Vilambit (slow tempo)

Madhya (moderate tempo)

Drut (very fast)

In this section both melody and rhythm players take turns to improvise.

Listen to a Raga...

1. Notice how smoothly each section merges with the other.
2. Try and identify the four main elements and briefly describe them.
3. What similarities does Indian Classical Music have with Jazz?

Indian Musical Instruments. String Instruments.

Sitar



The invention of the Sitar is commonly credited to Amir Khusrau, a courier of Allauddin Khilji in the 13th Century. The name Sitar was derived from Persian 'Sehtar' meaning 'three strings' which the instrument originally had. But the modern Sitar has seven strings fastened to the pegs on neck and the sides. Sixteen to twenty two frets are secured to the finger board by pieces of gut. There are also 11 to 12 sympathetic strings below the frets, running parallel to the main strings. The instrument is played by means of a wire plectrum worn on the forefinger of the right hand. It was instrumental in introducing western audiences to Indian Classical music.



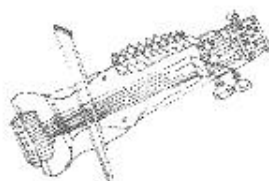
Sarod



Although the origin of the Sarod is not known, it is supposed to have descended from the rabab of the Middle East. Some believe that this stringed instrument might have originated from the Greco- Buddhist area of Gandhar (modern Afghanistan). The modern Sarod is made of wood with one end being rounded and covered with parchment. There are six main metallic strings fastened to pegs at the neck of the instrument. It is played with a plectrum held in the right hand while the fingers of the left hand are used to play the notes. It is fretless instrument with sympathetic strings. Sarod has secured an important place in Hindustani Classical Music for its deep and rich tone and a distinctive sound.



Sarangi



Sarangi is another stringed instrument mainly popular as a folk instrument and probably made its first appearance in the late 17th Century. The ability to play all types of gamakas gave it prominent place in Hindustani Classical Music. It is made by hollowing out a single block of wood and covered by parchment and has four strings. Four tuning pegs are fixed to the hollow head and a bridge is placed on the hide-covered belly in the middle. The player places the instrument on the lap and plays it with a horse hair bow in the right hand and fingers and nails of the left hand. The tone of the Sarangi is very near to the human vocal chord.



Santoor

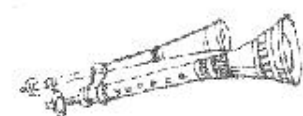


Santoor, which originated from the Vedic Vana Veena, is characteristic of the Kashmir Valley and is neither seen nor played anywhere else. The Vana Veena also had strings and was played with sticks. The modern Santoor is made of a trapezoid wooden box. There are thirty bridges and a set of four strings of metal, tuned to the same note, is stretched over each pair of bridges. It is played with a pair of flat wooden pieces curved at the striking ends. Today, Santoor is played with all Indian ragas and is very popular with film musicians.



Wind Instruments.

Shehnai



Considered to be an auspicious instrument, shehnai belongs to the category of Aerophonic Instruments. It is said to be of Persian origin and is a one reed instrument with six holes yielding soft and melodious sound. Made of a smooth dark-grained black wood, the tube is narrower on the top and widens towards the bottom affixed in a cup. All the tunes of full tone, half tone and sharp notes can be played on this instrument through breath control. The notes are continuous and is generally used in classical and light classical music.



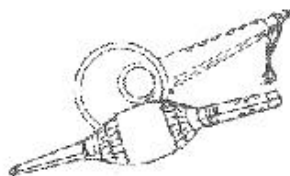
Flute



This wind instrument of ancient India was very common with Lord Krishna and the religious music of the Buddhists. Even the frescoes of Ajanta and Ellora depict this flute or Bansuri as an accompaniment to vocal and instrumental music. Being an instrument of great antiquity, its construction has remained constant over the years. It is made of a cylindrical bamboo pipe of uniform bore, containing six holes for movement of fingers and a bigger hole for blowing air. It is handled in an oblique position and air is blown with the upper lip into the main hole. Different octaves are produced by covering the holes with the fingers.



Nagaswaram

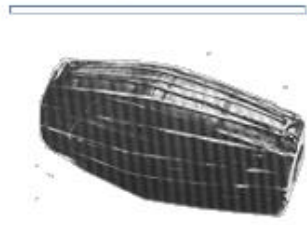


It is believed that this representative of the South Indian Music evolved from the snake charmer's Pungi. Nagaswaram was well known in the 15th and 16th centuries and formed an integral part of the temples. It consists of a wooden mouthpiece into which the player blows the air. This air under pressure is released from the lower end of the gourd through two bamboo or metal pipes. These tubes have a valve each to control air flow through the pipes and have holes to control the melody. Nagaswaram often attains a wild beauty and softness and brings out the subtle graces of Carnatic music.



Percussion Instruments

Mridangam



The Mridangam is perhaps the most highly developed and the most ancient of all percussion instruments. It is commonly used in the south as an accompaniment to the vocal and the instrumental performances. It literally means body of clay. The southern Mridangam is a cylindrical hollowed out block of wood. Skin covers the opening ends, and is fastened to leather hoops held taut by interlaced leather braces. A wide variety of tones are obtained from different parts of the instrument. For instance, the head can be struck with a full hand or with the fingers, which are clamped or released. The types of strokes are distinguished by an elaborate percussion terms. The alternation of sound between two heads of the Mridangam further enhances the tone.

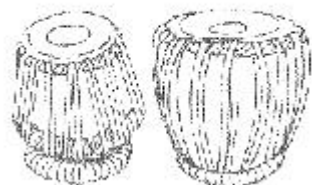
Ghatam



Ghatam, one of the ancient percussion instruments, often heard in Carnatic Music concerts, is a mud pot carefully kneaded and uniformly fired. The mouth of the Ghatam is open and is played with two hands, wrists, fingers and nails. The mouth is pressed against the stomach so that when strokes are given, the air inside is set in vibration and gives a deep tone. The player can elicit various volumes and tonal colours by giving the finger strokes at the neck, centre and bottom of outer surface.



Tabla



(Read notes on Tabla in the 'Tala and Tabla' section.)

Pitch and Melody.

From Ragas
to
Rasa.

'Better than a hundred years lived in ignorance
without contemplation, is one single day of
life lived in wisdom and in deep contemplation'.

The Dhammapada (The Path of Perfection).

'Ragas'. Students Notes.

The term **Raga** has a number of meanings. Some people translate it as a 'tune', others as a 'composition' and it has also been called an 'invocation' (calling to God). The simplest way of understanding raga is to call it a group of notes rather like a melody.

There are over 250 Ragas in Indian music. Each one has its own particular mood and association. No one knows exactly why certain colours, pieces of music and sounds can make people happy, sad or excited. For example,

**'Imagine you walked into a room that was painted bright red.
How would you feel?'**

Like colours, each raga has it's own special mood which can affect the listener.

Different ragas are played at different times of the day. There are morning, afternoon, evening and night ragas. Some express happiness courage or humour, while others express peace, sorrow or even anger. When the musicians chooses the raga they consider their own current mood. This is why musicians do not announce the raga that they are going to play until the actual time of the concert relying on spontaneity to influence their final choice.

Morning raga (Vibhas)
Mood-Lovliness, sound of the early dawn.



Drone notes C, A

Evening raga (Behag)
Mood-peaceful and relaxed.



Drone notes C, G

Night raga (Malakosh)
Mood-peaceful and relaxed.



Drone notes B, E

- In pairs take it in turns to play the ragas over the drone. (This can be played on keyboards, xylophones, glockenspiels, recorder etc...try different instrumental combinations). Notice how each raga has a different 'feel'.

'Nava rasa'.

The 'Nine Sentiments'.

The performing arts in India - music, dance, drama and even poetry - are based on the concept of *nava rasa*, or the 'nine sentiments'. Each artistic creation is supposed to be dominated by one of these sentiments. The more closely the notes of a *raga* conform to the expression of one single idea or emotion, the more overwhelming the effect of the *raga*. These 'sentiments' are placed in an acknowledged order.

- **Shringara**, a romantic sentiment filled with longing for and absent lover. It contains the holistic aspects of love and is said to represent the universal creative force.
- **Hasya**, is comic, humorous and laughter provoking. It can be shown through syncopated rhythmic patterns or a dialogue between instrumentalists (e.g. sitarist and tabla) causing amusement.
- **Karuna**, is pathetic, tearful, sad, expressing extreme loneliness and for either god or love.
- **Raudra**, is fury or excited anger. This *rasa* is often used in drama, but in music it can portray the fury of nature as in a thunderstorm. Musically it can be shown through many fast, 'trembling' ornaments, producing a scary vibrating effect in the lower ranges of instruments.
- **Veera**, expresses the sentiments of heroism, bravery, majesty and glory. A dignified kind of excitement.
- **Bhayanaka**, is frightening or fearful. It is difficult to express in music through one instrument though it can be managed in an ensemble or vocally.
- **Vibhata**, is repulsive and disgusting. It is difficult to show through music but has a strong role in drama.
- **Abhuta**, is wonderment, amazement, exhilaration and even a little fear as if one is experiencing a strange new experience (e.g. a fast fairground ride). Musically extreme speed and virtuoso technique can express it.
- **Shanta**, is the last *rasa* and shows peace, tranquillity and relaxation.

Improvisation project.

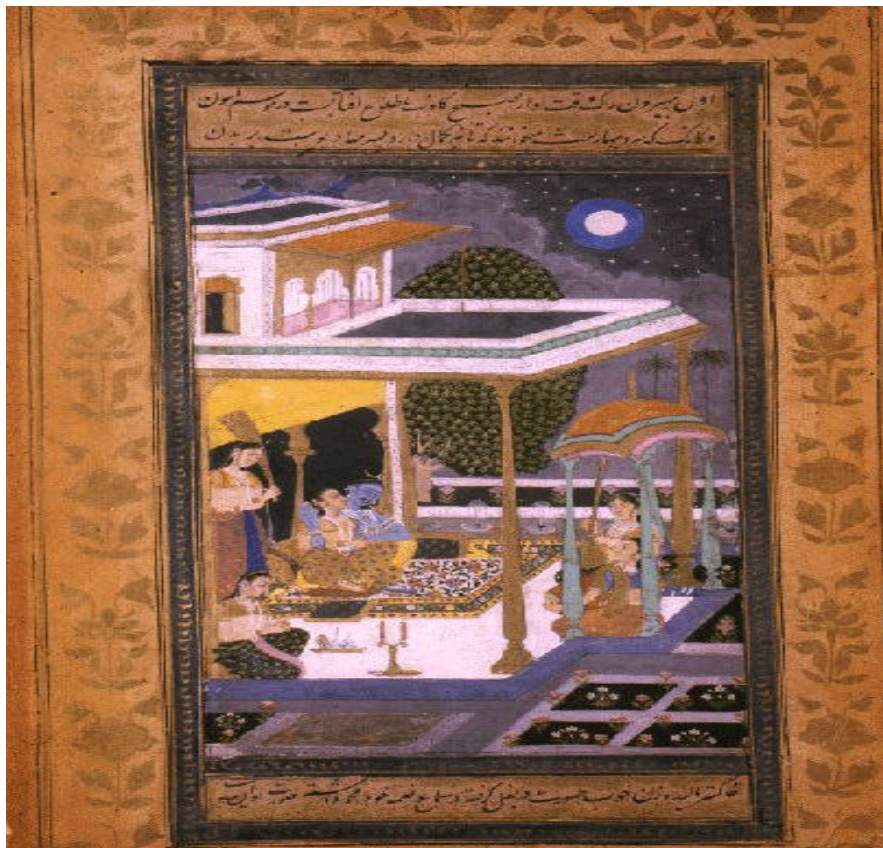
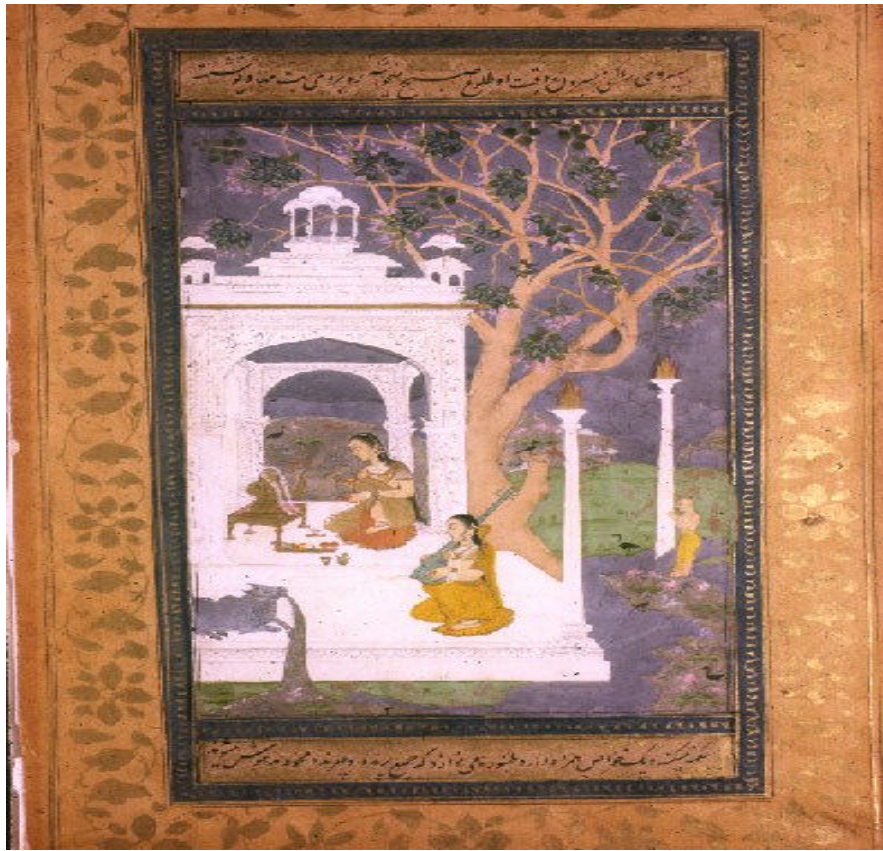
- In pairs choose one of the ragas learnt (Vibhas, Behag, Malakosh).
- Then choose two *rasa*.
- Experiment using melodic instruments (keyboards, xylophone, recorder) with the musical characteristics (speed, range, ornamentation etc.) of each *rasa*.
(Remember that certain characteristics can be explored in the **drone** part)
- Create a piece that acts as a musical journey from one *rasa* to the other.
Try and make your change between one *rasa* and the other as smooth as possible as if you were overlapping the moods.

As an extension activity pupils can work as a quartet (using different instruments) on structuring a characterised piece.

Karuna	Raudra	Karuna	Hasya	Shanta
Sad	Fury	Sad	Humour	Peace

(This project can be repeated after the pupils have worked on Tala.)

Ragamalan Paintings.



'Sargam'.or Sol-fa.

In Indian music *ragas* may consist of up to seven pitches. These are called *svara*. Each of these has a name:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Sadj</i>	<i>Risbah</i>	<i>Gandha</i>	<i>Madyam</i>	<i>Pancam</i>	<i>Dhaivat</i>	<i>Nisad</i>

But in a practical way only the first syllables are said in a similar way to what is known in the West as the **Sol-fa** system. The Indians call their system **Sargam**.



Sol-fa.	do	re	mi	fa	so	la	ti	do
Sargam.	sa	ri	ga	ma	pa	dha	ni	sa

Each *svara* is also associated with sound and pictorial images:

- Sa peacock's cry.
- Ri cow calling her calf.
- Ga goat's bleat.
- Ma heron's cry.
- Pa cuckoo's song.
- Dha horse's neigh.
- Ni elephant's trumpeting.

'A Sargam Song!'



sa re ga sa sa re ga sa ga ma pa ga ma pa

5
pa dha pa ma ga sa pa dha pa ma ga sa sa pa sa sa pa sa

- Sing through the song using *sargam*.
- As you recognise the tune try and sing it as a 'Round'.
- Try and work out the *sargam* for 'Londons Burning'.

'Londons' Burning'



5

Alap Project.

The Alap section is the first section of a raga. In this section the melody instrument introduces and explores the notes of the chosen *raga* over a drone.

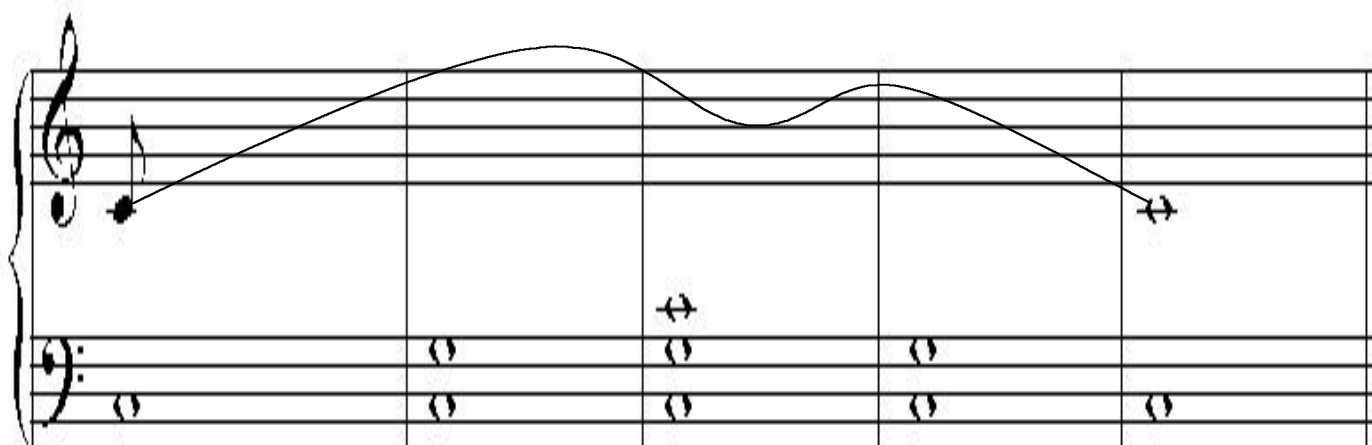
The mood of the Alap is peaceful with no sense of rhythm. The player also explores the pitch range of the instrument, usually starting low.

- Using **Raga Behag** (C, E, F, G, B, C,) create an improvisation which follows the pitch shape on the score.

Evening raga (Behag)
Mood-peaceful and relaxed.



Drone notes C, G



- Try and add the drone part to move with the pitch shape.
- Using **Raga Behag** and the same drone shape, try and notate your own pitch shape for an Alap, try exploring '*rasas*' (moods) as well as other ragas.
- Think about extending your Alap by repeating melodic ideas.
- Select an instrument appropriate to the mood (e.g. Flute or Violin. A guitar can make a good substitute for a Sitar!).

Rhythm.

Tala & The Tabla.

'In Western music we divide time
as if you were to bake a length of time
and slice it the way you slice a loaf of bread.

In Indian music
you take small units, or "beats"
and string them together
to make up larger time values'.

(Philip Glass)

'Tala'. Students Notes.

The word Tala comes from the syllable **ta** (representing the dance of the Hindu god Shiva) and **la** (the dance of his female companion).

Tala also means 'clap'. But now it is thought of as a rhythmic cycle. In Indian piece of music there is one basic tala or rhythmic cycle that is played slowly after the Alap section and gradually increases in speed through the **Jor** and **Jhala** sections. Finally the **Tabla** is played in the **Gat** section.

It is generally accepted that there are 360 talas. But some are rarely played because they are either unpopular, out of fashion, or too complicated.

The first beat (or **matras**) of the tala is the most important one and is called **Sam**.

All rhythmic patterns have to begin and end on the '**Sam matra**'. In between the rhythm player can improvise in any way they like so long as they finish improvising on the first beat of the tala.

The most popular talas in Indian music consist of **matras** of 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16.

Within each tala some matras that are given emphasis (accented) - these are called **Tali**. (Shown by a * -clap)

There is one matra that is empty - this empty beat is called **Khali**.

(Shown by a 0 -wave)

The combination of the **Sam**, **Tali** and **Khali** matras help the players know where they are in the tala as it gets faster and the improvisations get more complicated.

- Here are three talas. In pairs take turns to count the matras whilst you partner claps and waves on the Tali and Khali matras.
- Try and get faster as you repeat the cycle.

Jhaptal.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
*		*			0		*		
Sam		Tali			Khali		Tali		

This can be grouped as 2+3+2+3

Dhamar tala

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
*					*		0			*			
Sam					Tali		Khali			Tali			

This can be grouped as 5+2+3+4

Tintal

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
*				*				0				*			
Sam				Tali				Khali				Tali			

This can be grouped as 4+4+4+4

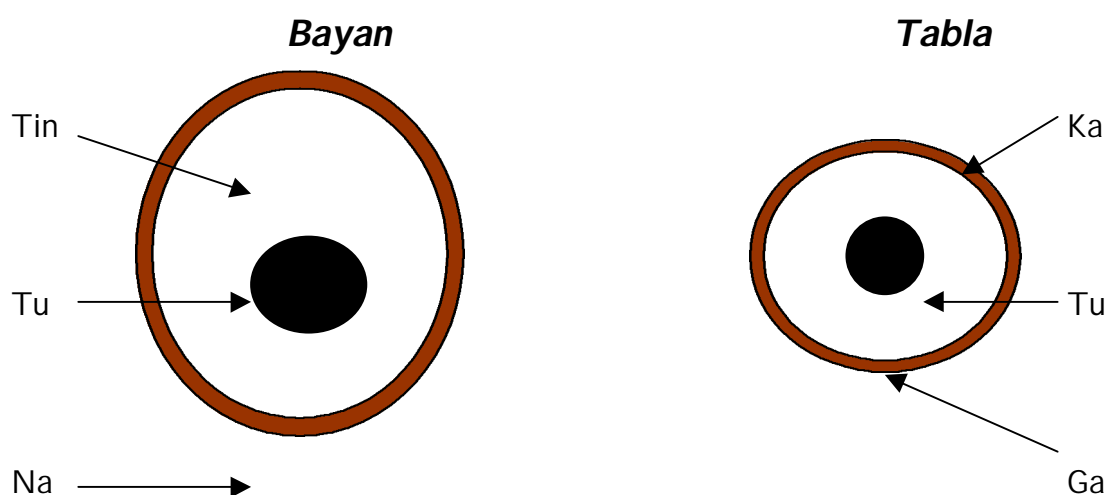
The Tabla. Students Notes.

A pair of drums called the tabla accompanies most Indian classical performances. According to ancient Hindu legends, Shiva (the god of music and dance) invented the drums. One story says that in the deep crevasses of the Himalayan glaciers, one often hears the 'thud' of heavy ice boulders falling down. These noises are believed to be from Shiva's drum.

The right-hand drum is called the **Tabla** and the left-hand drum, which is lower in pitch, is called the **Bayan**. The combined name for these drums is **Tabla-Bayan**. The tabla drum can be tuned by adjusting the tension of the head skin by moving the 'corks' on the side of the drum's body. The drums are made by a stretched layer of skin on the top, with a round black circle in the middle, made from a past of iron filings and rice powder -the thicker the powder the lower the pitch of the drum.

The tabla can make more than two sounds. The player can produce varied sounds by striking the 'head' in different places with his fingers or with the palm of the hand.

These sounds are taught through a drum language called '**Tabla Bols**' (meaning 'tabla words').



'Bol' Combinations.

- When **Na** and **Ga** are played together the sound **Dha** is made.
- When **Tin** and **Ga** are played together the sound **Dhin** is made.
- When **Tin** and **Tu** are played together the sound **Tete** is made.

- When **Tu** and **Tu** are played together the sound **Din** is made.
- When **Tin** and **Ka** are played together the sound **Ta** is made.

An example of Tabla Bols can be found with the **Tintal**.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
*				*				0				*			
dha	din	din	dha	dha	din	din	din	dha	tin	tin	ta	tete	dhin	din	dha

- In threes: One person counts the **matras** (beats), one marks the **Tali** and **Khali** (clap & wave) and the other says the **Tabla Bols**. Try changing roles each cycle.

'Create your own Tala'

Compositon.

1. Decide on how many matras (beats) you are going to have.
 2. Decide on how you are going to group the matras.
E.g. 5+2+3+4 (Dhamar Tala).
 3. Decide where the Tali (strong) & Khali (empty) beats are.
 4. Add 'Tabla Bols' for each matra; try not to use more than four.
- Notate your Tala in the Rhythm grid (don't forget to give it a title).

_____ (title.)

Matras (Beat)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1 3	14	15	16
Tali(*) Khali(0)																
Tabla Bols																

Performance.

- In a group of three begin by counting the matras, clapping/wave the Tali/Khali and saying the Tabla Bols.
- Then add percussion instruments (e.g. Woodblock for the matras), Cymbal for the Tali and four chimes [one for each Bol used] for the Tabla Bols).
- Rehearse slowly and speed up for the performance!

The Music Teachers guide to the Tabla.

TABLA:

Before we learn the basics, of method of playing the Tabla.

Let us first have a thorough knowledge about this instrument.

- Tabla is a percussion instrument.
- The Tabla is a dual instrument of percussion i.e. it consists of two different units of small drums viz. The Tabla and the Dagga or Bayan, which are collectively named as Tabla. Usually the Tabla is played by the right hand and therefore it is also termed as Dayan. Similarly the left hand plays the Dagga and hence it is termed as the Bayan.
- [These terms i.e. Dayan & Bayan, are universally accepted terms, although some people prefer to play the Tabla (Dayan), by the left hand.]
- The Tabla (i.e. the Dayan only) is made of wood. This wood is nothing but a finely cut trunk of a tree, which is approximately 1 feet in length.
- (*The wood used for this is very specific. It has to have the capacity, to hold sound within itself. Therefore, trees that have a very strong fibre - bond are used. E.g. Teak, Tamarind etc.)
- Then, the trunk of the tree is finely shaped externally in such a way, that the upper portion looks narrower than the lower base. At the base, again the piece of wood is so designed that a ring of at least 1 - 1.5 cms is seen projecting out of the broad base. This ring is exactly in the centre of the base, which in turn forms a small platform, which keeps the trunk, about 1 - 1 1/2 cms above the floor. This ring is termed as 'Baithak'.
- The piece of wood is then made hollow from inside keeping a thickness of about 1/2 an inch from the base so now, the upper end of the tabla is open at the top. On this open top is then enclosed by a leather covering, which is conventionally called 'Pudi'.
- The 'Pudi' is fixed tightly on the open top of the tabla, with the help of long leather straps. This is made possible by weaving the straps strongly through a round circular ring of hard leather, which encircles the 'Pudi' from the outside. This ring is called 'Gajra'. At the bottom of the Tabla, another small leather ring is affixed around the 'Baithak'. Thus the leather strap, which is called 'Vaadi', is bound tightly on the total body of the tabla with the help of these two rings. Now, to enable one to increase or decrease the tension on the Pudi, small wooden blocks are used. The Vaadi is pulled over these blocks to affix them on the body of the Tabla. These wooden blocks are called 'Gattha's'. They are (8) eight in number, always, on any size of Tabla. So a Tabla will always have 8 Gattha's. (* The small ring encircling the Baithak is called 'Pendi'.)
- These are in brief the main parts of the Tabla. Now we shall see the different parts of the 'Pudi'. The 'Pudi' shows **4** parts **(a)** Shae **(b)** Lav **(c)** Chaat and **(d)** Gajra.
- The Tabla Bayan rests on finely crafted circular rings, which are made out of cloth. These rings are big enough to enable the small base of the Tabla Bayan

pass through them and allow the base to rest on them. This makes it possible to keep the Tabla Bayan above the floor and minimises the movement of Tabla Bayan during the course of playing. These rings are termed as 'Chumbal's'.

Ideal Posture:

The most important aspect of learning to play any instrument, is the ideal posture. A correct posture discipline enables us to learn quickly and methodically. It also helps to build up a strong and correct technique.

- To learn the Tabla, the correct & ideal posture is to sit on the floor, preferably cross-legged, keeping the spine straight. The Tabla is kept on the right-hand side and the Bayan on the left-hand side. Both are kept in front of the crossed legs, near, and without touching, each other.
- The Tabla is kept slightly inclined and tilting forward and so is the Bayan. While placing the right hand on the Tabla, all the fingers should be joined and placed on the shae in such a way that the fingers point towards the Bayan. While placing the left hand on the Bayan, the wrist should rest behind the shae, on the "Maidan" and the entire palm of the left hand should rest over the shae of the Bayan.
- This is the ideal posture to be observed before starting to play the Tabla.

Start playing the Tabla

The first lesson for Music teachers.

The Tabla is played with the help of fingers. When we strike the surface of Pudi, with different fingers, on its different parts, a variety of tones and overtones are achieved. These are called 'Bols' (Also known as Varna). Now to be able to achieve a specific bol, only specific fingers are used. So let us first have a thorough knowledge about the names of our fingers.

- **The Thumb (Angutha) (in Hindi)**
- **Index Finger (Tarjani) (in Hindi)**
- **Middle Finger (Madhyama) (in Hindi)**
- **Ring Finger (Anamika) (in Hindi)**
- **Small Finger (Karanguli) (in Hindi)**

Now we shall study the 7 basic bol's that are played only on the Tabla.

These are :- (1) Na or Ta (2) Tin (3) Din (4) Tatt (5) TiTa (6) Da and (7) Na
(Pronounced 'N' as in 'nothing')

Let us see how these bols are played on the Tabla:

(a) **Na or Ta** : Place the palm of the hand on the Tabla in such a way that the 1st digit of the ring finger rests on the shae. To that join the small finger. Raise the Middle Finger & with the help of the Index Finger alone, strike the Chaat's to create an open resonating sound. This sound is called Na or Ta.

(b) **Teen** : The position of the hand is exactly similar to the one which we used to play Na or Ta. Only when we play 'Tin', the place where we strike with the Index Finger is the 'Lav' and not the Chati. The resulting resonating sound is called Tin.

(i) **Tunn** : When, with the help of the index finger, we strike the shae on its right side, the resulting sound is called Tunn.

(c) **Din** : To play 'Din' join all 4 fingers, excluding the Thumb. Without separating them, strike in the centre of the Shae. The strike should not be hard and fast, but it should be very gentle so as to create open & deep sound called Din. This sound is also called 'D' (pronounced as in 'These').

(d) **Tatt** : Join the middle finger, ring finger & the small finger. Now, with these alone strike the centre of the shae, hard enough to create a closed and cracking sound. This is called "Tatt".

(e) **Ti Ta** : These are two different Bol's. When we have to play these Bol's, the position of the fingers is same as in Na or Ta. Now, Ti Ta is played in two different ways. The **first way** is as follows; by joining the middle finger, the ring finger & the small finger, strike the centre of the "Shae", with gentle force, to create a closed sound, which is softer than 'Tatt' but similar. This sound is called 'Ti'. As soon as 'Ti' is played, lift the fingers and at the same spot, hit the "Shae" in the centre with the help

of the index finger to create a similar closed sound. This is called 'Ta'. Thus when these two bols are played immediately after one another. We get to play "Ti Ta". The **second way** is as follows; keeping the ring finger & small finger together on the Tabla, play Ti only with the middle finger & Ta with the index finger, similar to the first way.

(f) Da : (pronounced as 'Da` in "Done") When the 1st digit of the middle finger is used to gently tap the centre of the shae, the resulting sound is called "Da" .

(g) Na : (pronounced as `n in "nothing") with the help of the 1st digit of the middle finger, gently tap the `lav` of the Tabla, to create a small and slightly light resonating sound. This is called "Na".

So far we have seen the basics to play the Tabla. So let us now move over to the 'Bayan'.

Let us now see the basic bols that are played on the Bayan.

There are only 3 basic bols. These are:

(i) Ghe-Ghe : (also called, Ge, Gi, Ghee, Ga)

Ghe - pronounced as in Ghetto

Ge - pronounced as Ge in Get

Gi - pronounced as Gi in Give

Ga - pronounced as Ga in gut

(ii) Ke-Ke : (pronounced as K only) also used as Ka and Ki

Ka - pronounced as ka in come

Ki - pronounced Ki in Keen

(iii) Katt : (pronounced as Katt only)

K - as cu in 'Cut and att` as in 'ut' in cut.

Now we shall see how to play these bol's on the Bayan.

(1) Ghe : (Ghee, Ga, Gi or Ge) : Place your wrist of the left hand behind the Shaee, on the maidan. Thus the entire palm will come over the Shaee by covering it. In doing so, the fingers i.e. Index Finger, Middle Finger, Ring Finger & the small finger are kept joined together. Now, to play 'Ghe' raise the palm in such a way that the wrist remains behind the Shaee in its position. Fold the fingers pointing downwards & inwards in a semi-circular stage and with the help of the Middle Finger & the Index Finger, strike the portion in front of the Shaee, (which is in between the Shaee & Kinar) alternately & once by each fingertip. During this time, the wrist should be pressed downwards. The resulting sound is called as Ghe - Ghe. Always the tip of the fingers should be used to play 'Ghe'. Ghe - Ghe is always an open sound.

(2) Ke -Ke : (Ka, Ki) : The position of the hand is the same as for playing Ghe. Only to play K - K; one does not fold the fingers down-wards, but with a raised and straight palm strike the surface beneath without lifting the wrist from its place. The resulting sound is 'K K' and is a closed sound.

(3) Katt : To play Katt, all one has to do is raise the wrist above the Bayan. Close all five fingers and with a great force, hit the centre of the Shaee to create a hard but closed & cracking sound called Katt.

This is the way these bols are played.

So the Seven basic bols of Tabla & Three basic bols of the Bayan together make Ten basic Varnas (Bols) of Tabla (collectively ie. Tabla Bayan).

The Future...

The Music of Nitin Sawhney and Talvin Singh.

we have reached what could be
the final stage in musical change this century
but it is still in its early days
this music takes on many forms
breaks through many boundaries
I hear it in everything
but what does this mean to the rest of the
all seeing non listening world
nothing
but even this has a positive role to play
for the mass ignorance of joe public
reflects the brain washing society
we have come to call modern life
in fact
if an individual seeks enlightenment
he or she is often classed as a
nutter
space baby
freak
weirdo
by the mass body of brainless sheep
these patterns echo through the behaviour
of all of our so-called civil societies
putting all this aside

there is one way of communicating
of breaking through prejudice
...MUSIC

(A Guy Called Gerald -1997)

Nitin Sawhney A Biography.

Encouraged from an early age Nitin's creativity channelled his many diverse influences into his music. As a child, he excelled at the piano, studied flamenco guitar and formed a band. Even at this early stage, he was baffling his musical colleagues, and seeking out the connections between jazz rock, and the Indian classical music he was hearing at home. While his school peers were stuck in a rock groove, Nitin was listening to the complexities of Ravi Shankar, the Mahivishnu Orchestra and John McLaughlin.

After leading his own Latin jazz group for a while, Nitin was picked up by the James Taylor Quartet in 1988, and toured with them on guitar throughout the year. The following year he met Courtney Pine's then percussionist **Talvin Singh**. Finally he had the opportunity to work with someone who was not only Asian but also actively pursuing notions of combining elements of jazz and Indian classical music. The result was the formation of the Tihai Trio, a highly inventive and experimental group that allowed Nitin to push back the boundaries of his own musical experience, as both composer and musician and now programmer. Digital electronic technology could be utilised in blending contemporary sounds with the acoustic tradition of Indian classical music. At the same time, Nitin embarked on what has become a highly successful career, composing for theatre, film and TV, and was made composer in residence at Theatre Royal Stratford East during 1990/91.

In 1994 Nitin released the debut CD Spirit Dance. It successfully married the rhythmically complex music of Northern India and the harmonically complex music of the West. Critical and popular acclaim resulted in prestigious slots at Glastonbury and WOMAD, as well as dates in Europe and Canada.

The fusing went out of fusion long ago. But here, Nitin is bringing traditions together in new and arresting ways. If the success of Migration and Spirit Dance before it suggest anything, it is that Nitin is hitting a nerve - using the Asian experience to talk to the UK community as a whole, and doing it very eloquently indeed.

Beyond Skin.
Nitin Sawhney.



Track by Track.

5. Broken Skin:

The Prime Minister of India proudly announces the success of his Government's first nuclear test, a new beginning for Hinduism. The scene is set for...a laid back, funky soul groove with vocalist Sanchita Farruque singing like Aretha Franklin crossed with Carleen Anderson. She's singing about radiation sickness, yet somehow it sounds like a song of lost love. Perhaps it is...

6. Letting Go:

The groove is reminiscent of the Bristol group Portishead. The theme is departure, the emotional letting go of a country. It's 1945; change is afoot in India, which proved irresistible and irreversible.

7. Homelands:

Rampant percussion overlaid by a string quartet, cooled out by a flamenco guitar. The vocal chant is reminiscent of a **Qwwali** group whilst the refrain is sung in Portuguese; "Fragile is the land / And so are the minds of men".

8. Pilgrim:

A rap performed in an understated, almost feminine style delivering the story of an Asian coming of age. The mysterious instrument heard is called the Swarlin, a cross between a violin and an Indian sarangi. It's the only one in existence and Sawhney had to go to Bombay to record it.

9. Tides:

The middle of the album - this track and the next two, Nadia and The Immigrant -explores the theme of oceans as a symbol of time and space. Tides features Sawhney on piano accompanied by a Drum and Bass exponent (Marque Gilmore) on a set of Cymbals. An elegant, rolling in waves, live jam session set against an introduction that talks of the French nuclear testing on the Muroroa atoll.

10. Nadia:

Nadia means 'The River'. The vocalist (Swata Natekar) sings in the **thumri** style to create the feeling of rapids, over fast moving, jungle rhythms. In the song the water is her enemy, preventing her from joining a loved one across the other side. A tale that resonated as strongly in Kosovo as it did with the Asian immigrants of the 60's.

11. The Immigrant:

The track opens with Nitin's father explaining how he was inspired to move to England by tales of gold paved streets and photos of Kew Gardens. The male vocalist (a classical Bengali singer) sings of The Ferryman, a figure representing both fate and destiny in Bengali folklore. Sanchita Farruque (see Broken Skin) enters and as the song becomes a lovely soul ballad, the duet melding their distinct styles of East and West beautifully at the climax.

12. Serpents:

Hindu mythology tells how a huge serpent has coiled itself around the world-a portent of dark events, reflected in the dramatic string opening. The vocals are the spoken rhythms of **Kathak** dancing, in cycles of nine beats. Rushing percussion heightens the feeling of tension as events come to a head.

13. Anthem Without Nation:

The old India, sick with radiation poisoning, has changed beyond recognition. There's no going back for the elder generation, nothing to return to for the new. In England, meanwhile, Asians are concerned that they will never be accepted as entirely English.

14. Nostalgia:

Nitin's parents are heard once again, revealing their optimism for their children's future after some hard adjustment. The vocalist's first words are 'Dreams...' offering a child's perspective on such trusting innocence. The song is asking how the new generation of Asians in England ever truly understand what their parents and grandparents experienced in the old India, which no longer exists?

15. The Conference:

A spectacular, improvised vocal-tabla duet symbolising conflict and competition-perhaps between India and Pakistan, perhaps the West and East-reflecting how politics at the highest level leaves the people it's supposed to represent completely excluded and therefore alienated.

16. Beyond Skin:

Drawing the themes of the album together, the final song relays the words of the Atom Bomb co-creator expressing regret for his work. Ironically enough, he is quoting from the Hindu bible, the Bhagavad Gita, where the god Vishnu says, 'Now I am become Death-The Destroyer of Worlds'. The lyrics are to represent the voice of the Indian people asking 'What are we doing? What do we have left? Where is our heritage?'

In a time of growing political and global unrest, these are questions that resonate deep beneath racial and national divides.

OK
Talvin Singh.



What the press said about the 1999 Mercury Prize winning album 'O.K'.

"A staggeringly ambitious work recorded across four continents, which fused Indian classical music with cutting-edge Western dance in a glorious coming together of ancient and modern. OK is like listening to the present, past and future sound of Asian music".

Times Sep '99.

"OK is intensely Eastern, not just in its musical approach, but in its esoteric imagery and exotic mythical story telling".

Touch Oct '99.

"Traveller and Butterfly are epic soundtracks to the future".

Mojo Feb 2000

"OK is rich in moods and 'imaginary worlds' from the soulful vocals on 'Traveller' ("the world is sound") to the layers of culture on the mesmerising title track".

Mojo Feb 2000

Talvin Singh A Biography.

A question often asked:

What will music sound like in the 21st Century?

Ask Talvin Singh. He lives there already.

In the past, Talvin Singh has been fixed in print: an Asian artist, an Eastender, a tabla virtuoso. In fact, he moves fast between worlds, making connections, building an autonomous zone in which the spirits of

21st century music - young Indian players, New York nomads, London futurists - can coexist.

"Space is the place," said Sun Ra, bandleader from Saturn. Space has become a personal environment built through music, an imagined geography made from impressions of real places and a confusion of cultural ties mixed together with fantasy religions, vanishing civilisations and emergent future.

OK (released October '98) is from the floating world, music that captures the feeling of movement between identities, cultures, destinations and languages. A place between the body and the digital process. A zone of oscillation between traditions and heresy. In the gaps between genres, where music is currently at it's most interesting. Or in the vast differences of scale between rural village and urban supersprawl. Everywhere is exotic; nowhere is exotic.

OK was created in the blur of travel - Okinawa, Kerala, Bombay, Madras - yet realised in Brick Lane London, both a virtual space and a locus of real cultural struggles, a living history of people in transience looking for a firm ground. Travel gives perspective but also hi-lights confusions. "People have this idea of Bombay being a place with loads of poor people," says Talvin, "It's a crazy city. I find Bombay closer to New York. You go to Bombay and every other person is a video maker. Rave music and techno is so big among Asian kids in India now. Sometimes I go to India and I know more about our instruments and culture than they do. They're somewhat less interested. That's the way the world is". Growing up in Leytonstone, he moved between different worlds: breakdancing to electro with other young Asians, listening to Secret Affair and The Jam and learning to play tablas within the exclusive conservative world of Indian classical music. When Britain's Indian classical promoters rejected him, deriding him as a punk who dared to question them, Talvin decided to go his own way. He worked as a percussionist with Courtney Pine and Cleveland Watkiss and as a tabla player and musical director with Bjork (e.g. 'Venus as a Boy' from Debut) as well as with many other musicians and groups such as Future Sound of London and Sun Ra. Talvin finally released his own work as Drum and Space whilst overseeing Anokha, a recording label and management company for the sounds of the Asian underground.

But even the Asian underground can be twisted into a misnomer, a confusion of ethnic origins with musical realities. Talvin points at his racks of digital technology programmed with sitar and tabla sounds. "For me it's the attitude, he says, distancing himself from the shorthand stereotype of a sitar sample. I've got a track on which I've hardly any Indian instruments but my approach is more Indian or Japanese, where you think about something for months but when you get down to the point it's very fast. OK took me nine months to make, involving Okinawan and Indian singers a string section from Madras and a Sarangi master amongst many others".

Talvin's influences for the album were diverse and not always musical.

- 'Mombasstic', relates to his father, ejected from East Africa in the 60's by Idi Amin.
- 'Soni', sung over a dub bass by 12 female classical singers from Bombay, is based on a folk melody from Pakistan.
- 'Eclipse', was inspired by the screams of monkeys panicked by an eclipse over the sun in India.
- 'OK', emerged out of common links between Okinawan and Indian culture.

Why is the album called OK? "Because it's the most common expression in the world. You can go anywhere in the world and people know what OK means. Music shouldn't have boundaries. That's the way I've always seen music-Indian classical music, it's shocking how popular it is all over the world. Music is a language that everyone can identify with. That's the most valuable thing in music today, we're living in a time when things have got to unite".

(Edited from an interview by David Toop.)