

# A Glimpse into the Realm of Music

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## Abstract

Music is an art that brings joy to every sentient being in the world. It transcends nations and time and is regarded as a fine art. It delights the hearts of all. Everyone generally has a desire to sing. Even if they are not accomplished singers, it is rare to find someone who has not at least hummed a few lines of a song they liked.

The Indian musical tradition has been evolving from the Vedic times. It is a part of both ritualistic and household practices. Right from the Yajnas and Yagas described in the Vedas, to the household chores like threshing of grains, music has been an integral part of Indian culture. This musical tradition has been commented upon in various literary works across India. Kannada, a classical language of India, is not an exception. Many poets in this grand tradition of Kannada literature dating back to 2000 years have described the music of their times in their works, enabling researchers to trace the development of Indian music.

**Keywords:** Indian classical music, Classical Kannada Literature, Shadaksharadeva, Nada, Rajashekhara Vilasa

## Indian classical music and its outline

India has a rich musical tradition that dates to ancient times. Music in India holds a sacred place. From the beginning, it has attracted various ethnic groups, languages, and cultures, becoming an integral part of them. Music has been regarded as a limb of both religion and literature.

The origin of music is traced back to the Vedas, with the Sama Veda forming its foundation. Thus, there exists a sacred belief among Indians that music is divine. Depictions of Goddess Saraswati playing the veena and Lord Shiva with his damaru are commonly seen in our culture.

Tyagaraja's famed words, "**Sāmanigamaja sudhāmaya gāna**," highlight the nectar-like quality of music born of the Vedas. Music is classified into two types: **Marga Sangeeta** and **Desi Sangeeta**. Marga Sangeeta refers to the sacred and divine music, while Desi Sangeeta is the regional music, varying according to place and community. The major branches of Desi Sangeeta are Indian and Western music. Indian music is further divided into Hindustani and Carnatic based on region and singing styles.

Instruments play a significant role in enhancing the beauty of music. Musical instruments exhibit great diversity. Instruments are classified as **Tata (stringed)**, **Sushira (wind)**, **Avanaddha (percussion)**, and **Ghana (solid)**.

- **Tata Vadya (String Instruments):** These produce sound through strings. They are further divided into **shruti** (drone) and **sangeeta vadya** (melodic). The tambura is a shruti instrument. Violin, sarangi, veena, and mandolin are melodic string instruments.
- **Sushira Vadya (Wind Instruments):** These produce sound through air. Examples include the flute and nagaswaram.

- **Avanaddha Vadya (Percussion Instruments):** These produce sound by striking stretched membranes. Examples include the mridangam, dolu, and tamat .
- **Ghana Vadya (Solid Instruments):** Made from metals or clay. Examples include bells, cymbals, ghatam, and morching.

The importance of music is truly realized when the seven musical notes are heard with these instruments. Music leads one into a world of emotion and elevates the soul, offering a sublime experience. Literature also contributes to this experience. When the beauty of literature merges with music, the joy becomes indescribable. Thus, literature and music share an inseparable bond.

### **Shadaksharadeva's Rajasekhara Vilasa and Music**

Many poets have described the greatness of music and instruments in their works. One such great Kannada poet is **Shadaksharadeva**, the author of **Rajasekhara Vilasa**. He composed works in both Kannada and Sanskrit and was a leading Veerashaiva poet and pontiff. Through his poetic mastery, he heightened the beauty of literature and frequently referenced music and instruments, indicating his deep knowledge and passion for music.

In the **Rajasekhara Vilasa**, the son of Satyendra Chola, Rajasekhara, is punished with death sentence by the king after the son of Tirukolavinaaci dies by getting stuck under the hooves of a horse, while Rajasekhara was with his friend Mitavacana. Everyone, including the minister dies, the divine chant **"Om Namah Shivaya"** resonates from their heads, prompting Shiva to appear and grant them life. This forms the core of the epic.

The poet portrays the sanctity of music in this work.

**"Manemanedappadoppidudu veeneya melluli rajakeera nim  
pina nudivasadinchara mudaara mrudangarava shivastuti ||  
svana murughantikaarutiya jeyajeya dhvani saamagaanani |  
svanita masheshaastraninadam ghanashankhada naadamaavagam"**|| (Vru. 94 pg. 42)

In every home in the city, cultured artists lived. In the temples dedicated to Shiva, the veena was played, the sweet calls of swans heard, the melodic sounds of flutes echoed, accompanied by the rhythm of the mridangam. During prayers, the sound of bells and conches could be heard. To enhance the sacred atmosphere, singers performed **Samagana**. Everything was filled with divine sound. The temples resonated with devotional music, deeply moving the hearts of the devotees.

**Tunga mrudanga mangalaravam kahalaadhvani taala nisvanam |  
rangada paanga sangatha nati navanartana maagamapragho ||  
shangala bhanga shankha ninadam banadam badedirddabhaktalo |  
kangala kangalam gavise samgalisirppuvu lingagehadol** | (Vru. 12 pg. 48)

The auspicious sounds of the mridangam, kahale, and t las accompanied the dance on stage and the recitation of agamas. The conch's sacred sound filled the air, drawing the minds and eyes of devotees toward the linga. Singing, dancing, and instrument playing marked the temple rituals. Joyous occasions like childbirth were celebrated with energetic music, as described in many literary works.

**"Mrudu mrudanga patu patuha shankha taala kahalaa  
venu veenadhyaneeka lokakarnakautuka kara  
vitataanavadya vaadyaravam dashadisheyolapirbi pasariseyum"**

Skilled musicians would softly and expertly play the mridangam, along with other instruments like nagari, shankha, tala, kahale, flute, and veena, astonishing listeners. The sounds spread in all directions, signifying a joyous event.

Music held high esteem in royal courts. Skilled artists received royal patronage. The title Asthana Vidwan (court musician) is still in use. The poet details the musicians' excellence to demonstrate his understanding of music.

**“Madhura mandra taara swaragalim shruthiverasi  
kaldara kiviye saviyem saigaredu rangi rakthidori  
shuddhamishra sankirna raagamgalim ranjisi paadi  
mohipa Sangeetha visharadarim”**

(Vachana pg.99)

The poet appears as a true music connoisseur, recognizing the importance of **shruti** in music. **Mandhra** (low) and **Taara** (high) registers are considered fundamental. Mandhra includes notes below the base shadja, and Taara includes those above the nishada of the middle octave. Singing gracefully across three octaves is not easy. The singers would match the Shruti in these octaves for a melodious performance.

“In pure ragas, **Melakarta** and **Upanga** ragas are included.”

(Karnataka Sangeeta Deepika, Dr. V. S. Sampatkumaracharya & Prof. V. Ramaratnam, pg. 48) Some considered **Kriyaanga** ragas as **Vakra** (zigzag) or complex ragas. Those with the term “Kriya” in their names were called Kriyanga ragas. Ragas that blend elements of different ragas are known as **Sankirna** (mixed) ragas. For example, ‘KalyanaVasantha.’ (Sangeeta Paribhashika Kosha, Vol. 2, pg. 47, Dr. V. S. Sampatkumaracharya) Singing such complex ragas was the skill of experts, who were present in royal courts.

Even in war, music played a role. As kings headed to battle, war instruments would be played to boost soldier morale -

**“Moreva chambakavareya molaguva palahada  
Soolaipa nisaalada pooraiya shankhada damadamavemba  
Dimdimada bhoremba kahaleya bobbiduva  
Biramaddaleya jathiguduvu tambatada bembalavidida  
Bombuliya giremba girugatiya nibidathara  
Paturatanadodane ghudughadipa subhata patala”**

(Vachana pg. 125)

Thundering chambaka, roaring tamatē, the sound of shankha, and rolling dindima, biramadala, Rhythmic tamatē, bombuli, and girugatti added to the clamor, creating an inspiring battle soundscape.

Marriage is a major life event. Music, singing, and auspicious instruments are inseparable from wedding ceremonies. **Sobane**, a type of folk devotional song, is sung during weddings. Singers praise the bride and groom. During the **mangalyadharana** (sacred thread-tying), instruments are played loudly. The poet describes this vividly.

**“Pade shobhanamanamganeyarkkalmangala paatakarurvnikom |  
daade bhorgaredu vadyayaninadam tivire bhoovarabaandhavar |  
node santasadinagama ghosham ponmire janmege homamam |  
made bhoo surarilapathi puthram raivididam kamalakshiyam |  
Shadaksharadeva names many ragas in his poetry:**

(Vrutta 6 pg. 180)

**“Sulalithe varali kunthale |  
vilasathkalyani, shankarabharana samu ||  
jwalaveni ragaranjithe |**

**chalisade posadene somamukhibajisidal” || (Kanda 88, pg.240)**

Varali, Kalyani, Shankarabharana, and Desi ragas were in use. He also describes birdsong and musical notes used in compositions.

**“Alarvakkigaluliyam rathi |**

**kalahada kadaleya dainyarasaravamam ||**

**jalakalamarala madhu madhuratheyim || (Kanda 61, pg.273)**

The chirping of birds sipping nectar, the tenderness of love, the sweet call of royal swans—all these, when combined, form music that is pleasing to the ears, says the poet.

Another example of his deep knowledge of music is his reference to the Nagas **Kambala** and **Ashvatara**, who received music as a boon through penance. Their initial compositions were known as **Kambalas**.

**(Karnataka Sangeetha Deepike, pg.31, Dr. V Sampathkumaracharya, Prof. V Ramaratnam)**

**“Mrudula rava vilatha karnadhrutha kambalaashvatha Sarasa Sangeetha” (Pg.292)**

## Conclusion

Indian classical music is a gift that keeps on giving. This is realized by the learned and ignorant alike. The musical aspects have been ingrained in the works of many poets, and Shadaksharadeva perfectly exemplifies a person with mastery over both music and literature. This also helps explore the various facets and genres involved in a good epic that stands the test of time. Despite Rajasekhara Vilasa containing descriptions of eighteen virtues, music occupies a special place. Though this work is not a musical treatise, it helps identify the music of his times inadvertently. The poet’s use of apt references shows his refined sensibility and reverence for music.