



## 5

**SWARAS**

Hindustani music is a very complex and a beautiful tradition of music that goes back over 3500 years. It originated from Indian music and is more popular in the north of India. When you learn a language, you start with certain basic things like grammar and vocabulary and then you start making your own sentences. In Indian classical music also, you have to learn about the basic notes or swaras, before you are introduced to ragas (musical themes). After the mastery of the swaras, you are encouraged to start improvising and making your own melodies. It is really not difficult to improvise melodies, once you have mastered the Swaras. In this lesson we shall learn about the origin of these swaras and their names.

**OBJECTIVES**

After studying this lesson, you will be able to :

- explain the origin of the Swaras;
- name the Swaras in Indian classical music;
- identify their equivalents in animals and birds and
- describe the three main elements of music.



Notes

## 5.1 ORIGIN OF THE SWARAS

When did you first experience the music?

When you were infant, whenever your mother wanted you to sleep, whenever she wanted to feed you, to console you etc. mother sung a song. Eating, sleeping, playing and anything was done with songs being sung by your mother or any other lady in the house. These songs used many types of music, such as classical, semi-classical, light etc.

Let us hear a story to understand better about the origin of these swaras.

### THE SINGING COMPETITION

The tiger Ravivarma, king of Kalinga forest, was looking after all the animals as his own family members. Ravivarma always liked listening to the music and singing. He himself was a great singer. Everyone admired his talent for music. Once he wanted to know if there was any other animal who can sing like him. Therefore he organized a competition for all the animals and birds. Everyone thought that "I'm the best singer in the world and Ravivarma will select me only". They all started singing together. But you know how disturbing, it is if everyone sings at the same time.

King Ravivarma said, 'I cannot select the best singer if you all sing together'. Then Ravivarma asked all the animals, birds, reptiles, insects etc to register for the competition. Wild animals,



domestic animals and forest birds registered for the competition as all wanted to win the competition.

After everyone registered in the competition, the king started calling them one by one on the stage to show their talent before the jury. It was really a great competition. It continued for almost 4 - 5 days. On the last day of the competition, they were all very eager to know the results. This competition was very special. They selected 7 animals and birds among all and not just one, out of thousands. In order to standardize the competition they said that the "Swara" will be made standard. All singers, were asked to follow the norms and standards. Peacock, cow, goat, heron, nightingale, horse and elephant were selected winners.

The jury fixed 7 Swaras corresponding these animal as follows:

1. Peacock - Shadaja (Sa); the rapturous sound of the peacock when rain clouds gather in the sky;
2. Cow - Rishabha (Re); the bellowing of a cow when her calf is separated from her
3. Goat - Gandhara (Ga); the bleating of a goat in a flock
4. Heron - Madhyama (Ma); the cry of a heron
5. Nightingale - Panchama (Pa); the sound of the Indian Kokila (nightingale) in spring



6. Horse - Dhaivata (Dha); the neighing of a horse
7. Elephant - Nishada (Ni); the trumpeting of an elephant

## 5.2 THE SWARAS IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

Even today the Indian classical music is very much set to these standard Swaras.

A swara is the selected pitches from which the musician constructs the scales, melodies and ragas. Swara is a Sanskrit word that connotes a note in the successive steps of the octave. An octave is the interval between one musical pitch and another with double its frequency. In music, the pitch of a note means how high or low the note is. A swara is the selected pitch.

North Indian and South Indian classical music are two distinct traditions, but they share many similarities like the seven swaras.

There is a belief that the seven 'swaras' in the Hindustani Music were conceived from the sounds of the nature. The seven swaras as we all know are -

1. (Sa); Sa, Shadaja
2. (Re); Rishabha
3. (Ga); Gandhara
4. (Ma); Madhyama

5. (Pa); Panchama
6. (Dha); Dhaivata
7. (Ni); Nishada

An interesting thing to note in the swaras is that Sa, Ma and Pa are sounds made by birds whereas Re, Ga, Dha and Ni are sounds made by animals.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.1

Match column A with column B

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>
1. Peacock	(i) (Re); Rishabha
2. Horse	(ii) Nishada (Ni)
3. Cow	(iii) Panchama (Pa)
4. Nightingale	(iv) Shadaja (Sa)
5. Elephant	(v) Dhaivata (Dha)

### 5.3 MAIN ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Ancient Indians were deeply impressed by the spiritual power of music, and it is out of this that Indian classical music was born.

Most music has at least 3 main elements. These are the melody,



rhythm and harmony. Hindustani music mainly concentrates on melodic development..

**Melody** : The melodies of Indian music are based on ragas (in southern India, raga). Like a scale, the raga is a list of the notes that are used in a particular piece of music. Raga is a set of Swaras.

**Rhythm** : The rhythms of Indian music, rather than being organized into short measures, are organized in long rhythmic cycles called talas (in southern Indian thaalam). There are more than 100 different talas.

In a performance, the rhythm has an important role as it gives texture and a sense of purpose to the melody. Taal or Talas, literally a clap, is the term used in the Indian Carnatic music for the rhythmic pattern of any composition and for the entire subject of rhythm. Rhythm performs the role of a time counter. A Taal is a rhythmic cycle of beats on a percussive instrument. Each such pattern has its own name. Each repeated cycle of Taal is called as avartana.

**Harmony** : The harmony is mainly supplied by instruments such as the sitar, tanpura or santoor. Harmony in Indian classical music is mainly the result of the tanpura playing a combination of the tonic (sa) and the fifth (pa) or fourth (ma) in a fixed pattern in the background. The Tanpura instrument has four very

long strings. The strings are plucked one after the other, continuously throughout the music. It takes about 5 seconds for one four-string cycle to be plucked, and although the drone itself is constant.

Songs and poems can be sung in different Ragas. While singing if you add rhythm, song will be more enjoyable. With Raga and Tala any song will be really soothing.

The combination of Raga and Tala set to a song makes the music. Ragas and Talas can be produced through vocal cords, instruments etc. Whichever Swara you are singing in your voice can be replicated in Veena, Flute, Sitar, guitar, clarinet, keyboard, violin etc. Whichever Tala is being indicated in your voice can be produced on Tabala, Mridanga, Ghata, drums etc.



### **INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.2**

Explain the following in one sentence only:

1. Swaras
2. Melody
3. Rhythm
4. Harmony
5. Taal



**Notes**



Notes

**WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT**

- Origin of the Swaras
  - Peacock - Shadaja (Sa); the rapturous sound of the peacock when rain clouds gather in the sky.
  - Cow - Rishabha (Re); the bellowing of a cow when her calf is separated from her.
  - Goat - Gandhara (Ga); the bleating of a goat in a flock.
  - Heron - Madhyama (Ma); the cry of a heron.
  - Nightingale - Panchama (Pa); the sound of the Indian Kokila (nightingale) in spring.
  - Horse - Dhavata (Dha); the neighing of a horse.
  - Elephant - Nishada (Ni); the trumpeting of an elephant.
- Names of the Swaras in Indian classical music
- The three main elements of music.
  - the melody
  - rhythm and
  - harmony



**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. List 7 Swaras corresponding the animal.
2. Explain the following terms: Swara, Octave and Pitch.
3. How does the Tanpura helps to create harmony?
4. Briefly discuss the method of making singing of song soothing and melodius.

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****5.1**

1. - (iv)
2. - (v)
3. - (i)
4. - (iii)
5. - (ii)

**5.2**

1. Swaras.- A swara is the selected pitches from which the musician constructs the scales, melodies and ragas.
2. Melody- The melodies of Indian music are based on ragas (in southern India, ragam).

**Notes**

## CLASS-II



## Notes

3. Rhythm- The rhythms of Indian music, rather than being organized into short measures, are organized in long rhythmic cycles called talas
4. Harmony -
5. Taal - The harmony is mainly supplied by instruments such as the sitar, tampura or santoor.