



Indian Instrumental Music

Plucked-Stringed Instruments (Tat)

This class of instruments is characterized by plucked strings. In ancient times, all instruments of this class were referred to as “veena”.

❖ Sitar



The “sitar” is the most well-known Indian instrument. It is long-necked with usually 17 strings, although the number of strings may vary. It has 3 to 4 playing strings and 3 to 4 drone strings. The strings are plucked with a wired finger-plectrum called “mizrab”.

There are also a series of sympathetic strings lying under the frets which are almost never played but they vibrate whenever the corresponding note is sounded. The frets are metal rods which have been bent into crescents. The sitar is used in a variety of genre which is played in North Indian classical music, film music and Western fusion music.

❖ Saraswati Veena



The “saraswati veena” is the instrument associated with Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the arts. It is one of the most common instruments in Carnatic music. It has a body made of wood, usually jackwood. The highest quality veenas have the entire body carved from a single block of wood, while the ordinary veenas have a body carved in 3 sections (i.e. resonator, neck and head). There are 24 frets made of brass bars set into wax. It has no sympathetic strings like the sitar. It has only 4 playing strings and 3 drone strings. The main bridge is a flat bar made of brass which has a very slight curve. This is the curve that gives the veena its characteristic sound. The right hand plucks the strings while the left hand frets the instrument.

❖ Ektar



The “ektar” is a simple folk instrument. It is literally known as the “one stringed flute”. It is nothing more than a gourd which has been penetrated by a stick of bamboo. Another piece of bamboo forms the tuning peg. The bridge is merely a coin, piece of coconut, plastic or similar object. In the northern part, the ektar has a membrane stretched over the gourd and the bridge is placed over the taut membrane. The ektar is very popular in folk music and has a strong rustic connotation.