



Indian Instrumental Music

Bowed-Stringed Instruments (Vitat)

❖ Sarangi



The “sarangi” is a common representative of vitat. It has 3 to 4 main playing strings and about a dozen sympathetic strings. The instrument has no frets or fingerboard. This instrument is extremely difficult to play and as a result its popularity is declining. This instrument is traditionally associated with “kathak” dance and the vocal styles of thumri, dadra and kheyal.

❖ Esraj



The “esraj” is a combination between “saringda” and sitar. The base of the instrument is like saringda while the neck and the strings like sitar. It gives a sound very much like sarangi without being as difficult to play. The esraj is popular in the Bengal area of India.

❖ Dilruba



The “dilruba” is a cross between the sitar and the sarangi and it is extremely close to the esraj and the “mayuri veena”. The difference is in the shape of the resonators and the manner in which the sympathetic strings attach. The neck has about 18 strings and like the sitar, almost all of the playing is performed upon only one string. There are a number of metallic frets as well. The dilruba is popular in North West India, in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Wind Instruments (Sushir)

This class of instruments is characterized by the use of air to excite the various resonators.

❖ Shehnai



The “shehnai” is of North Indian origin. It has 2 upper reeds and 2 lower reeds. It has a wooden body with a brass bell. The reed is attached to a brass tube which is wrapped in string and it has 8 holes. Its sound is considered particularly auspicious and hence it is played in temples and at weddings. This instrument is also a close relative of the “nadaswaram” found in South Indian music.

❖ Pungi



The “pungi” is the snake charmer’s instrument. The word “pungi” is a generic term for many reeded noisemakers. The pungi is typically 1 to 2 feet in length. It consists of 2 reeds or bamboo tubes. One of which is for the melody and the other is for the drone. These are attached to a larger cavity made of gourd or coconut. Inside of which are 2 reeds. These reeds vibrate when air is passed over them.

❖ Nadaswaram

The “nadaswaram” is a South Indian version of the shehnai. It is also called “nagaswaram”. It is substantially larger than the shehnai and has a simple double reed rather than the more complex quadruple reed. It is considered a very auspicious instrument and is played at temples and at weddings. It is normally accompanied by a “surpeti”, “ottu” and a “taval”.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Indian music is a very complex system and yet a beautiful one. Through music, one can express his/her emotions which sometimes words cannot convey. It is also through music that one can reach spiritual satisfaction. Hence, man should learn to appreciate music and its beauty.