CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SITAR
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SITAR INSTRUMENT

While working with the sitar it is essential to have a glance at the historical development of the instrument. There is a lot of confusion about the inventor of the sitar. Amir Khusroo is said to have invented this instrument. A traditional story, especially favored by Muslim musicians, credits Amir Khusroo with the invention of the sitar. Khusroo’s life is surrounded with legends & it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. He is primarily remembered as a poet in the court of Ala-ud-din-Khilji (1296-1315), the sultan of Delhi. Some evidences prove that he invented the Ghazal & Kavvali vocal genres of North Indian music. But there is no evidence that he invented the sitar, nor is there any evidence that he modified a pre-existing instrument & named it sitar¹. If we go back to the history of the sitar we cannot move more than 300 years in the past. So, for the last 30 -40 years this notion has been totally disregarded and it is granted that the modern shape, size and quality of sitar has emerged after a gradual development of a single or more than one veenas. Here is a brief history of the veenas from Pre-Vedic period till Mediaeval period where lies the root of modern sitar.

The Veena has its root in Pre-Historic period; so far as history is concerned the sitar also got its ancestry from the Pre-Vedic or Vedic period. Pre-Vedic excavations resulted in the sculptures and stone pictures of Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Chonhudaro, Jhukar, lothal etc. civilizations. We may remember Mr. Roy Bahadur Dixit’s remarks in this context:

"Some of the pictographs appear to be representations of a crude stringed instrument, prototype of modern veena, .......”²

Ancestors of sitar from the Vedic Era:

The general name “veena” played a very important role in the vedic liturgical; world. A wide variation of “Veena” was prevalent in the Vedic society and quite a number of them used to be played in the important Vedic sacrifıces.

¹ ‘Sitar Technique in Nibaddha Form’ – Stephen M. Slawek, p-6
² ‘Bharatiya Sangiter Itihas’ – Swami Prajnanananda, part – 1, p-
“Vina”:

“Vina” is a very ancient Indian string instrument and a number of varieties of Vina are referred to in the Vedic texts. ‘Satapatha Brahmana’ prescribed the playing of Vina in the ‘Asvamedha’ Sacrifices. Vina was also played in the ‘Mahavrata’ Sacrifices, a variety of ‘Somayaga’. Though a full description of the Vina is missing in the Vedic texts, a partial idea of its appearance however, can be gathered from two Vedic texts, ‘Aitareya Aranyaka’ and ‘Sankhayana Aranyaka’.

Naradiya ‘Siksha’ a later Vedic text, shows two varieties of Vinas – ‘Gatravina’ and ‘Daravivina’. By ‘Gatravina’ he meant palm, because there is a practice of indicating different musical notes on different points of fingers while singing ‘Samagana’. So the Vina, as a musical instrument, with all its varieties, falls under the category of wooden lute.

‘Alavuvina’: The reference to this Vina is found in the ‘Jaiminia Brahmana’, ‘Latyayana Shrauta Sutra’ and ‘Paninia Siksha’. ‘Alavuvina’ as its name indicates, is probably a kind of Vina whose resonance box is made of ‘Alavu’ (Gourd).

‘Kapisirsni’ : This also belongs to the class of Vina and its typical name suggests that probably the top of its ‘Danda’ looked like the face of a monkey (Kopi). It is referred to in the ‘Jaiminiya Brahmana’ and conjointly with ‘Vakra’ in the ‘Srauta Sutras’ of the Samaveda.

Seven stringed Vinas in ‘Natyashastra’ of Bharat:

‘Chitra vina’ is the name of seven stringed instrument mentioned by Muni Bharat in his ‘Natyashastra’(written around 2nd c. B.C. – 2nd C. A.D.). In his words:

“Saptatantri bhabechitra” [Natyashastra 29/118] and about its playing style:

“chitra changulivadana” [Natyashastra 29/118]
Chitra vina is played by means of fingers. Bharat mentions about another vina ‘Vipanchi’ of 9 strings (‘vipanchi nabatantrika’) and played by means of a ‘kona’. This ‘kona’ is a plectrum or mizrab, that is yet to be revealed.

Bharata described –

‘Konavadya vipanci syaccitra cangulivadana’

Abhinava Gupta interprets the word ‘ca’ in the verse (before the word ‘anguli’) to suggest that the kona and the fingers are involved in the playing of both ‘vipancii’ and ‘citraa’.

‘cakarenobhayavadanamubhavoruktam.’

He does not seem to agree with those commentators according to whom the vipancii is played with the kona and the chitraa with the fingers; nor does he agree with the view held by others that vipancii is played with both kona and fingers while citraa is played with fingers alone.

“anye tu cakaara e(me) vaarthe varnayantah konam
vipancyaangulim ca citraayaam niyamayanti/
anye tu konangulivadya vipanci angulimatravadya citretyahuh.”

No other informations are found in this treatise regarding this vina.

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1 Abhinava Bharati on Natya Shastra 29,118cd, p 124
2 Abhinava Bharati on Natya Shastra, ‘Musical forms in Sangeet Ratnakara’ Dr. N. Ramanathan
Instruments in ‘Sangeet Ratnakar’:

‘Sangeet Ratnakar’ is a brilliant synthesis of all previous musical learning. It was written by Sarangadeva at the court of the Yadav King Singhana II (1210-1247) in Devgiri (today’s Daulatabad). This great scholar has clarified the ‘Gandharva’ and earlier types of music and documented contemporary music in a complete structure. Sarangadeva was well versed with both the theoretical and practical aspects of music along with other subjects. He was also famous as ‘Nihsanka’, his pen name.

The ‘Sangeetratnakara’ is organized into seven chapters or ‘adhyay’. They are Swaradhyay, Ragadhyay, Prabandhadhyay, Prakimadhyay, Vadyadhyay, Taladhyay and Nrityadhyay.

The Vadyadhyay is rich with 11 types of vina, 15 types of venu, drums and metallic instruments. Following Bharat Muni Sarangadeva classified instruments into 4 classes – Tata, Avanadhyya, Ghana and Sushir. Apart from this, he has classified instruments according to their utility –

✓ Shuska Vadya – that can be solo performed
✓ Gitanug Vadya – played to accompany Gita
✓ Nrityanug Vadya - played to accompany Nritya
✓ Dwayanug Vadya - played to accompany both Gita and Nritya

The etymological meaning of the word giita would be ‘that which is sung’. But according to Sarangadeva ‘gita’ refers to melodic structure irrespective of its source of production. The units of gita, svaras are said to be produced by varnasa, vina and sarira (the human body).

Vamsinasariraani trayomi svarahetavah’.

In the Vadyadhyaya, while clarifying instruments on the basis of their functions, Sarangadeva states that from Tata and Susira arises gita.

‘... tatra purvaabhyam srutidayidvarato bhavet gitam’

In spite of the basic difference in their functions, the tata, sushira, Ghana and avanadhyya vadyas are all grouped together for the simple reason that all have to be played (vadyate). The playing of these 4 kinds of instruments

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1 Bharatśa Safgeet Prakarsha – Itihaas o Tatva’ Navaneeta Chattopadhyay, p - 114
2 ‘Musical forms in Sangeet Ratnakara’ Dr. N. Ramanathan
produce sounds which are different in nature from each other. The sounds produced on the tata vadya are of the nature of svara(svararupa).

1. Sarangadeva has used the word 'vadya' in the simple sense of the musical instrument. Discussing vadya in this sense, Sarangadeva speaks of the various types of musical instruments – Tata, Sushir etc.

2. In the context of the structure and mode of playing of different instruments, another sense of the term is found, i.e. 'the mode of playing an instrument' e.g. after describing the instrument called ekatantri vina, Sarangadeva describes its hand technique pointing out the use of the left hand, the right hand and both together. He then states – the different modes of playing on the ekatantri, making use of the various hand techniques, are called vadya.

‘etadhastasamaayogaad vaadanam vadyamucyate’.

3. The term ‘vadya’ is again applied to the mode of rendering a song(gita) on an instrument. e.g. Sarangadeva speaks of the three ‘vadyas’ – ‘tattva’, ‘anugata’ and ‘ogha’, of rendering a song on the five vinas – nakula, tritantri, chitraa, vipanci and mattakokila.

‘ tattvam bhavedanugatamoghasceti nirupitam.
Gitanugam tripakaram vadyam....’    --SR 6, 171 abc

4. Finally, the word vadya is used to denote instrumental composition. Instrumental compositions are of two types, melodic & non-melodic. Nirgita-s \(^1\) came under the melodic type and are meant for the vinaas Nakula etc. as they are based on the dhatu-s or modes of playing on these vinaas

‘bhedaannirgitavadyasya vainasyathya pracaksmache’.... SR 6, 178 cd
Sarangadeva is considered as the first author who has given a brief description of different types of vinaas. According to him ‘Nakula’ vina has two strings and ‘tritantrika’ has three. ‘Chitraa’ has got seven strings and ‘Vipanchi’ has nine(SR 6,112cd). According to Abhinava Gupta, Sarangadeva considered Mattakokila as the primary(mukhya) vina because it

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\(^1\) Nirgita: are melodic forms which consist of an instrumental part and a vocal part. --‘Musical forms in Sangeet Ratnakara’ Dr. N. Ramanathan, p-330.
has a three octave range. The other vinaas including Chitra and Vipanchi are its 'pratyangas'.

The practical significance of the 'anga-pratyanga' classification is seen in the 'karana'-s (not Karan - dhatu, which is a kind of Dhatu) described by Bharata. Karanas are the ways in which the pratyanga or subordinate vinaas present a modified version of the melody played by the anga or primary vinas. There are several ways in which the modification is brought about by the pratyanga-vinaas. They are six in number –

1. rupa
2. krtapratikrta
3. pratibheda
4. rupasesa
5. ogha
6. pratisuska

Saranadeva also described these Karanas. But they do not seem to be involved in the performance of the nirgitas.

Regarding the mode of playing of the vinas Sarangadeva seems to accept Abhinava's interpretation of Bharat that vipanci and chitraa vinas are played both with 'kona' and 'anguli'. And he is silent regarding the mode of playing on the other vinas.

**Excavation of Kudumiamalai:**

Around 7th century A.D. references of 7 stringed instruments were found in excavation of 'Pitalkhora' and 'Kudumiamalai'. The instrument referred to, according to Dr. Bhandarkar * appears to be the 'vina' since it has been given the title 'chatusprahara svaragamah' or authoritative texts of notes produced by the four strings of the instrument. The name of the instrument is 'parivadini' as could be seen from a small level on top of the 'Valampuri Ganesha' which reads – 'Parivadini Amar Kosa', in the 'Natya Varga' speaks of this instrument as –

'Vina tu vallaki vipanchi sat u tantribhih......Saptabhih parivadini'

The three names 'vina', 'vallaki', 'vipanchi' denote three kind of vinas, but that which has seven strings is called 'Parivadini'. The 'Buddha Charita' by
Asvaghosa says that it is a big vina and has strings made of gold. All these proves that Mahendravarman’s vadya was ‘Parivadini’ with seven strings.

According to Marcel Dubios, the long-necked lute appears for the first time in a tenth century sculpture at Pattadakal in south India (1941: 89). The lute depicted here may have been some sort of hybrid of the early stick Zither and short necked lute. Still there is a possibility of importation from west Asia – the long necked type lute style which did not keep any record of itself in Indian art or literature.

The first depiction of stick Zither with Gourd resonators is seen in seventh century work known as ‘Descent of the Ganges’ or ‘Arjuna’s Penance’ located at ‘Mahabalipuram’ in Tamilnadu. The stick Zithers depicted here are held diagonally across the chests, with the gourd above the left shoulder. The lute depicted at “Pattadakalaal’ is held similarly, except that the standing posture has now changed to a sitting one. The north Indian Bin and Sitar are also held likewise. These instruments also have Gourds as resonating chambers.

A fretted Vina is first seen in a tenth century sculpture at ‘Abaner’ in the ‘Harsatmata Mandir’. The instrument is a stick Zither with notably raised frets, much like those of the modern Bin and may be considered the fore runner of the ‘Kinnari Vina’ described by ‘Sarangadeva’ (Mishra 1973 : 08, Plate 19).

Sri Lalmani Mishra is of opinion that the Sitar is a descendant of the Vinas prevalent in India during the twelfth century., His view is – the raised frets, broad bridge and presence of drone wires are purely Indian innovations. He also states that the sitar was previously known as ‘Tritantri Vina’ or ‘Jantra’. He maintains that the ‘Tritantri Vina’ described by ‘Sarangadeva’ as a fretless instrument, acquired frets at a later date and was known as ‘Jantra’. In support of this information he cites a passage found in the fifteenth century treatise ‘Kalanidhi’, ‘Kallinath’s Commentary’ on the ‘Sangeet Ratnakar’ in which the ‘Tritantri Vina’ is said to be known as ‘Jantra’.
In ‘Ain-i-Akbari’ Abul Fazal-i-allam has given the following description:

‘The ‘yantra’ is formed of a hollow neck of wood, a yard in length, at each end of which are attached the halves of two gourds. Above the neck are sixteen frets over which are strung five steel wires fastened securely at both ends. The low & high notes and their variations are produced by the disposition of the frets.’

In the 14\textsuperscript{th} century only the ‘eka raga vina’, which was tuned according to the notes of the scale and was taken up for playing, appears to have been popular. Although, there seem to have existed quite a number of vinas, as can be understood from the pages of ‘Vasavapurana’, the ‘eka raga mela vina’, with movable frets, later on developed into ‘sitar’. This vina was very popular for a long period as found in references in Telugu literary works.

**Ragamala paintings as source of pictographs of musical instruments:**

Artistic impulse is one of the most fundamental elements in the human psyche which is expressed at times through the medium of art. Recent excavations have shown that even in pre-historic times cave dwellers used to embellish their primitive habitations with paintings which possess remarkable vigour and grace. The Indian artistic tradition is among the most ancient and richly varied in the history of mankind.

In the Ragamala paintings there is a confluence of two major artistic stands, ‘miniature paintings’ and ‘classical music’. Often two or more art forms are combined, and are enriched with each other. Indian artists have chosen the Ragas as the favourite subject along with the Raginis and Ragaputras (the consorts and offsprings of the six male Ragas). As miniature paintings developed mainly in North India, the Ragamala Paintings deal essentially with the Hindustani traditions. Each Raga, Ragini or Ragaputras are associated with a very special mood created by a combination of season, time of day or night. Some of these paintings also include the use of different types of vinas which were painted around the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} century.

\[^{1}\text{‘Ain-i-Akbari’ – Abul Fazal, Bengali translation by Shri Sukumar Roy.}\]
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Ellastrations of the Ragamala Pictographs

Raga Bhairava:
This painting illustrates Bhairava or Shiva, seated on terrace of golden pillars with Parvati, attended by musicians and chauri bearer. It is early dawn around sunrise and stars are still visible. Bhairav is sung at this time during the months of September and October.

Ragini Jogia Asawari:
The melody is represented by two women, one of them playing a Been(Pungi), the snake charmer’s musical instrument. She is seated under a tree in a rocky landscape, surrounded by snakes.

Ragini Kukubh:
This ragini is set against a golden background and surrounded by beautiful peacocks with golden plumes, the ragini plays on the Rudra veena.

Ragini Kedar:
A kanphata jogi is seated under a tree listening to the music of Rudra Veena. This is particularly a melody which induces meditative mood.

Hariballava has translated (17th C.) in Hindi, Damodar’s treatise ‘Sangeeta Darpana’(1625). Here we find some miniature paintings of some ragnis that also consist of usage of veenas.

Ragini Sarang:
In this painting a lady is playing a veena, seated on the rock near the wood, surrounded by deers.
Ragini Trivana:  
It's a lady with a tambura seated on a cushion in the forest (looking towards left).

Ragini Pahadi:  
A lady with a tambura seated on a rock. She is of golden complexion. Pahadi is played during the rainy season, represented by dark clouds and golden lightning.

Raga Megh:  
This painting is an attempt to depict the mood evoked by the Megh Raga series. It shows the blue skinned God Krishna dancing in joyous abandon. He holds a stringed instrument in one hand and is accompanied by two female musicians. Trees with large peacocks perched in branches flank the group. Rain is pouring down from the cloudy sky above, for this Raga celebrated the arrival of the monsoon that breaks the dry summer heat and revives the land.

Ragini Lalita:  
Standing before a light green field holding two flower garlands, the hero remembers the passions of the previous night. He glances back at his beloved, who lies asleep on a couch. A maid cools her mistress with a fan, modestly pulling a scarf over her own face to avoid the hero's gaze. A groom, a horse, and a musician wait patiently near the stair-case in the foreground.
Apart, there are more paintings where the long necked lute type veenas are painted. Though their names cannot be assumed, nor any of them can be claimed as the predecessor of sitar. Many historians tried to connect the origine and development of sitar from some of the foreign instruments. In fact there are many such instruments which resembled with early Indian sitar. There may be some influence, but there is no point in accepting any of them as the predecessor of sitar – when India was so rich with a good number of vinas (or Indian Tanbur – as mentioned by many scholars).