CHAPTER : II

“STRINGED INSTRUMENTS”

2.1 What is a Musical Instrument?
2.2 Classification of Musical Instruments
2.3 Tat Vadhyas or Stringed Instruments of Vedic & Ancient Period (Historical Survey of Old Veenas)
2.4 Modifications in Old Veenas
2.5 Historical Background of Stringed Instruments
2.6 Conclusion
STRINGED INSTRUMENTS IN VEDIC PERIOD

2.1 What is a Musical Instrument?

Most broadly put, it is any material used for producing sound in music. The oldest instrument is the human body which has been called the ‘Gatra Veena’. ‘Veena’ word is used for some specific ‘Tat Vadhya’ or stringed instrument namely ‘Matt Kokila’, Vipanchi or Ek-tantri veena. On the other hand ‘Tat Vadhya’ is named ‘Veena’ i.e. an instrument which has ‘Tat’ or ‘Tantri’ can be called veena. When we are talking about Tat Vadhyas, we mean Veenas.

2.2 Classification of Musical Instruments

The oldest detailed exposition of musical theory which has survived the ravages of time is found in the treatise entitled ‘Natya Shastra’ written by ‘Bharat’. The 28th chapter of this grantha deals with Shruti, Swara, gram, tal, etc. This book tells the story of four types of musical instruments namely Tat, sushir, Avnadh and Ghan Vadhyas.

Indian musical instruments have a very important place in our day to day life. These have been kept under four categories:

1. Tat Vadhyas
2. Sushir Vadhyas
3. Avnadh Vadhyas

1. Tat Vadhya:— These are the stringed instruments which
produce swaras when plucked by mizrab or plectrum. Tat Vadhyas are also of two types: Tat and the others are vitat vadhyas. The first category consists of sitar, Tanpura, Sarod which are played with the help of fingers and plectrum or mizrab. The second category includes sarangi, Be-la, Israj etc. which are played with the help of Bow. Tat vadhyas are called chordophones in English.

2. **Sushir Vadhyas:** These are wind instruments, blown by the mouth either by full or half breath. These are pipe like instruments. The flute, nafeeri, poongi, shehnai, been, klarnete, mouth-organ etc., all come under this category.

3. **Avnadh Vadhyas:** The instruments which are made of stretched skins in the hollow circular form at one end are called avnadh vadhyas. Tabla, Pakhawaj, Nagara, Damru, Mridang all are of Avnadh Vadhyas family.

4. **Ghan Vadhyas:** The instruments which are struck by the hand or a wooden stick are called ghan vadhyas. Metal bells, Ghadial, Mazeera, Jhanj, Kartal, Jal-Tarang, Kashat-Trang, all these instruments are listed in this category.

I am of the opinion that instead of four categories, the above mentioned instruments should be divided into two groups only.

1. Instruments relating to swara
2. Instruments relating to Tal-laya or rhythm.

Under first category come the following instruments:-
Veena, Sitar, Tanpura, bela, sarod, flute shehnai, Harmonium, Piano, Jal-Tarang, Kasht-Tarang etc.

The second category consists of Tabla, Pakhawaj, Drum, Dhol, Majeera, Jhanj, Kartal etc.

2.3 Stringed Instruments of Vedic Period

(Historical survey of old veenas)

To predict the time period of vedas, there is a lot of difference of opinion among different historians. Some consider it to be as old as 6600 B.C. and according to another group, it is 3100 B.C. But all agree that vedas are our basic granths, in whichever time they might have been written.

Samveda is musical in form and nature. It is a compilation of the shalokas or mantras of Rigveda, when these shalokas or mantras were sung, the tamburist played the Tambura. This process of singing or this technique of mantra singing was called samgan. Sa means prana and am means energy in Sanskrit. Gan means ‘gatha’. Samgan was known as the medium, through which songs (gans) in praise of gods and goddesses were accompanied by veena which depicts that stringed instruments were prevalent in that period also.

“In samgan, an instrument called ‘Vaan’ or ‘Venu’ was played. It had seven swaras namely:

1. Krushtha (Kruta)
2. Prathma
3. Dvitiya
4. Tritiya
5. Chaturatha
6. Mandra
7. Atiswara

“The word ‘van’ seems to have been derived from its fore runner ‘vana’ which means (sound) ‘van’ conveyed the idea of sound and musical tone”.2

These seven notes were — Ma, Ga, Re, Sa, Ni, Dha, Pa. The other names for these seven notes were :
1. Udaat
2. Anudaat
3. Swarit

The munis or the musicians of that period gave new names to these swaras as :-
1. Shadaj
2. Rishabh
3. Gandhaar
4. Madhyam
5. Pancham
6. Dhaiwat
7. Nishaad.

We get to know about the Tat or stringed instruments from the great granth Hiranyakeshi sutra. This book contains the names of Talluck veena, Kand veena, Pichhora, Alabu Veena, Kapisheerash Veena etc. Gatar Veena was very much popular in the vedic period. We get a brief information about the instruments popular in those days from the Upnishads and samhitas. Kaand veena is described in Kathak Sanhita (Manu samriti granth). We come across Marood veena in Rigveda Sanhita. Another name for veena was vaan. It was played with the help of ‘Nakhi’, which was worn on the first finger of the right hand. Nowadays it is known as mizraab. We get the description of shat tantr veena in shankhayan sharaut sutra. (By Kapil Muni)

“In samgan, Alabu veena and sheel veenas were played. Alabu veena’s name comes in Paniniya shikhsa’s shalok no.23. The gatra veena used to be played in the sam gana before the sacrificial alter and the Daarvi Veena to the accompaniment of Jati-raga-gana. Gatra veena had seven strings. The method of playing this veena was just like harp and lyre of the western countries.”

**Stringed Instrument in Ancient Period**

While studying Ramayana and Mahabharata I came across variety of stringed instruments which were prevalent in that period.
In Ramayana (400 B.C.), the oldest veena named ‘Vipanchi’ is described. Gandharva sangeet was popular in Ramayana Yug. Veena Vaadan was done as solo as well as for accompanying the Gandharav gaan.

In Mahabharta period, the following veenas were popular.

1. Adambar veena
2. Analambi Veena
3. Amrat Kundali
4. Alabu Veena
5. Alapani Veena.

The description of Alapani veena is found in Sangeet Ratnakar, Sangeet Samyasaar and Sangeet Sudha etc.

6. EK-tantri veena

It had only one string. It was played with 12 inches long ‘shalaka’. We can say that EK-tantri is the mother of all veenas. It is said that Lav & Kush used the EK-tantri veena in Ramayan gatha.

Ghoshwati, Ghoshak and Brahma veena are also the names for EK-tantri veena. It was popular from 7th century to thirteenth century. All the books related to music and written in this period depict in detail about EK-tantri veena.

The famous writers of this period are Someshwar, Sharangdev, and Sudha kalash etc.
Again we find one instrument EK-tara which is the name for EK-tantri veena but this instrument is small in size and is played (plucked) with a finger nail just to produce sweet sound while singing.

The players of EK-tantri veena used to produce all swaras on one string only. They had full perfection in swaras.

7. Kachchapi Veena:— It is described in ‘Natya Shastra’ written by Bharat. The guard of this veena was flattened one and the rest of the shape was just like EK-tantri veena. It had two strings and was played with two fingers of the right hand.

8. Kaand veena:— This veena’s name comes in Kaathak sanhita.

9. Kalawati veena:— The reference of this veena is given in ‘Vadhya Parkash’ written by Pt. Vidhya Vilasi, but the writer has not given any clue to the playing techniques, or its shape. It is only imagination that because it is listed in veenas, so it might be having strings one or two, as the other veenas were having.


11. Kinnari Veena:— The description of this veena is found in Sangeet Ratnakar and Sangeet Saar. This veena had two strings and fourteen frets. The musicians of this period set two octaves on the finger-board and plucked the strings with the first finger of the right hand.

Matang Muni is the inventor of Kinnari Veena. There were no frets on any veena before Matang. He originated this technique and put fourteen to eighteen frets on the finger board.
One Kinnari Veena is exhibited in Calcutta Museum, which has three strings, it is thirty five feet long and has three guards. The stringed instruments which are prevalent these days have the developed shapes of EK-tantri and Kinnari veena.

12. **Kubizika Veena**: A little reference of this veena is given in ‘Vadhya Parkash’, by Pt. Vidhya Vilasi⁶ Sangeet Makrand by Narda⁷ and ‘Sangeet Sudha’ by Pt. Raghunath.⁸ There is no description for its playing techniques, the shape of the instrument etc.

13. **Koormi Veena**: Sangeet Sudha and Sangeet Makrand contain the name of this veena. ‘Vadhya Parkash’ also gives a little description of this veena.

14. **Maha Natak Veena**: In Karnataka Academy of music, one veena named ‘Maha Natak Veena’ is lying which has seven strings. The shape of this veena is like Tanjauri veena. The playing technique is the same as that of the EK-tantri veena, which has no frets. Batta been is the child of Tanjauri veena or EK-tantri veena. The only difference is that of strings.

15. **Ghoshwati veena**: Maharishi Bharat has explained this veena in his ‘Natya-Shastra’.⁹ All the sangeetacharyas agree to this point that EK-tantri and Ghoshwati veenas have oneness in shape and size. The only difference is that of strings. The EK-tantri veena had only one string whereas Ghoshwati veena had nine strings. The vaadak or the player used only first string to produce resonant sound and the others
were just sympathetic strings which when plucked produced sweet sound.

16. Tambur veena:— There are controversies regarding the place of origin of tumbur, but it must be admitted for many reasons that this instrument originated in the soil of India. This instrument evolved from the EK-tantri veena. The artistes of Indian music gradually developed the finger plucked simple EK-tantri veena to the four stringed tumbur veena. Like Narda, Tumbru was a gandharav and this veena is connected with his name. This Tambur veena developed 4 strings and became Tambura in 14th century and then the name ‘Tanpura’ was given to this instrument.

17. Chitra Veena:— Another form available is chitra veena, the great granth ‘Natya Shastra’ gives the description of this instrument. According to Bharat it had seven strings and was played with the index finger of the right hand. It was very much popular in the fifth century.

Till the 7th century, vipanchi, chitra, ghoshwati and shat tantri veenas were prevalent.

Changes Found in Stringed Instruments:

About the changes, in stringed instruments precisely this has been found:

1. The instrument which seems to be like a harp is Vipanchi Veena (Nav-tantri)

2. The present sarod seems an advent of chitra veena. (Sapat-tantri).
3. EK-tara has a shape which seems to be derived from ghoshwati veena or EK-tantri veena. The advent of sitar can be traced back from chitra veena which had seven strings.

4. Swar-mandal had also seven strings which is described in Sangeet-Saar.

Some information or knowledge is gained through pictures. After visiting caves, temples and stupaas the instruments which are shown in the pictures are EK-tantri tamburu veena, ghoshwati or EK tara etc.

The architects make the sculptures to their imagination, but we can't say that they depict the exact shapes of the instruments. It is not necessary that an architect or sculpturist should have the full knowledge of all the musical instruments. Any mistake could be done in showing the strings, the shape, pegs etc.

Though we see the vipanchi veena with nine strings and chitra veena with seven strings, but no clear reference is given about the turning and techniques of these veenas.

In Natya Shastra, we don't find any description of five or six stringed veenas, but we can well imagine from the pictures of sculptures with five or six strings that those were made by the artists and the pegs are not at the angle from where the picture was drawn.

The Rabab is derived from chitra veena which became popular in 16th century. With some changes it took the name of sursingar and then became sarod. "Tansen is said to be the inventor of Rabab, he made it on the basis of Tambura and Sehtar."10
The Tritantri veena had three strings. The veena which samrat Chandergupta Vikramaditya played was the same one. It is the same veena, which Amir Khusro got from some-where and named Sehtaar, because Seh-means three and taar means string, hence the name. Though actually it was Tritantri veena, but Amir Khusro gave it the name of Seh-taar in his own Persian language.

The veena which was prevalent in Sharangdev’s time i.e. Tri-tantri veena, was called Jantar also by the people of that period, and it is called the mother of sitar.

Dev Vratt Chaudhary’s opinion is that sitar is the modification of Tritantri veena. Which was called Jantar and the same became sitar.

“तत्र त्रि-तन्त्रिकै लोके, जन्म शब्दमोच्यते”

In Sangeet Parijaat, one Dandi Veena’s description is given. It had also three strings. Its gourd was at its left side because the tradition to keep the gourd on ones shoulder, while playing was very popular. Sometimes it was burden-some to play in this position. So some modification was done in this veena. The gourd was fitted at right side, so that it could stand on the floor and was easy to play also. The veena player could sit easily with folded legs and keep the veena before him on the ground.

This tradition came into existence in the 13th century”.

Besides the above mentioned veenas and stringed instruments we get to know about the following veenas from the study of ‘Raag Vibodh’
written by Som Nath, one of the most valuable of ancient treatises that have been handed over to us. There is no copy of this granth available but the work is mentioned by sir William Jones.


“The Brahma veena was made by God Brahma and was played with a twelve finger long shalaka. There were no frets and only one string was there. This is known as the `Mother of all the veenas”.14

After Brahma God Shankar made an instrument named Analambi veena, but a research scholar should always doubt the sayings of others. A shop in a village can be named as Bombay Cloth House, but it does not mean that the village is in Bombay. Similarly there is no relation of Saraswati veena with Goddess Saraswati.

“Narada’s veena was named Mehti veena. It had 21 strings and was played with finger nail. Another veena named Vipanchi was made by Rishi Swati and it had nine strings.” 15
2.4 Modifications or Changes in old Veenas

The development or modification of the Tri Tantri veena starts from the 13th or 14th century.

“The Yantra or Jantar is formed of a hollow neck of wood a yard in length, with two gourds at each end. It has sixteen frets, five steel wires. The low and high notes and their variations are produced by the disposition of the frets”.

Tat Vadhyas or stringed instruments have gone through ages (Vedic period, ancient period middle age and modern period).

1. **Vedic Period** :- There was only one string for every swara and one hollow gourd was fitted on left side of the pipe or daand. It was touched or plucked with index finger nail.

2. **Ancient period** :- Some plectrum or bow was used to produce resonant sound, sometimes, a long stick called shalaka was used to produce swaras on veena.

3. **Middle age** :- In third place the frets were attached to the finger board for showing swar-sthan or pitch of swaras. The frets were called sundaris or sarikas. The main string was on the inside of the finger board and gourd was on the left side. It was kept on the shoulder of the player. In this period (10th century) the Tritantri veena got some more modifications with frets attached to the finger board and the player could produce four to five swaras with one string, whereas it was difficult for the veena vaadak to reach so many swaras on EK-tantri or Tri-tantri veena.
4. Modern Period:— The last but not the least change had started in the thirteenth century as far as the string instruments are concerned. All the stringed instruments now like sitar, sur-bahar, vichitra veena, sarod, sarangi, Israj, Dilruba etc. have the same style of putting the frets on the finger board.

The main string came on the outside and was plucked with plectrum worn in index finger of the right hand. The frets are called ‘Pardas’.

2.5 Historical Background of Stringed Instruments

I as a curious onlooker went in details of the history of world instruments to know, if the sitar is of Indian origin or from other country?

For this I consulted so many books such as “Universal History of Music” by Raja Sir S.M.Tagore. ‘Vishva Sangeet Ka Itihas’ by Amal Dash Sharma. ‘Instruments of the World’ by S.M. Tagore. I visited Canada and States from where I could get some material. I went to Saskatoon University, Calgary university in Canada and state Library in N.Y. in U.S.A. where I consulted so many books on the history of stringed instruments of the world and those which are prevalent in other countries. I took some pictures also of the instruments which are preserved by the Head of the Deptt. of Music in Saskatoon University.

1. Thailand:— One Tuk-Kay named instrument is prevalent which has three silken threads as strings and it has frets also. This instrument is played with plectrum and is of veena’s shape.
2. **Burma** — Saung or Soum is a boat type instrument which has thirteen silken strings and is played with plectrum. Another instrument which is common in Burma is Thro. This is also like Indian veena.

3. **Russia** — Lyre is very much popular in Russia which is made of tortoise skin on which seven strings are put and then it is played with the plectrum.

4. **Greece** — Pythagorus in Greece has agreed to the fact that the Lyre with seven strings prevalent in Greece is a gift from India to this country, which became popular in mediaeval period with the name of sitar but no evidence is available as to who gave it to whom.

5. **China** — The Indian Lute (veena) was very much famous in the period 2855-2735 B.C. in the reign of king Fu-Hsi.

6. **Arab** — “There are two types of Rabab prevalent in those countries, one is Rabab-a-shaer and the other Rabab-esh moganny.

   Rabab prevalent in Jawa and Sumatra is a modification of Indian EK-Tara and has two strings. Rabab is only a modification of Veena of the Hindus, the only difference being in body of the instrument.”

   Actually Rabab is a Mohammeden instrument with a wide shallow bown made of wood, covered with parchment. It is something like shortened sitar but has no frets EK-tara has also one open string and no frets. So one thing common in one country is copied by other natives. It is an obvious fact.
7. **Japan** — “There are so many stringed instruments prevalent in Japan (one string to 13 stringed) The Inst. of one string is called summa-koto and 13 stringed is named Lono-Koto. Another instrument prevalent in ancient period in Japan was Biwa which was made of sandal wood with beautiful carvings and had five strings. In ancient period, the scale was only of five swaras, but now they have seven swaras like Indian music.”

8. **Lanka** — One Venrah or Venah named instrument is seen in Lanka which has two strings. Its gourd is of coconut, a long finger board on which two strings are fitted with pegs. This instrument is played with a bow.

9. **Persia** — Qanun, which has 72 strings is of Persian origin which has the shape of Indian sitar. Another instrument in Persia is Taus or Mayuri, a peacock fiddle which is also similar to sitar. It takes its name from the peacock like resonator.

10. **Italy** — A two stringed (Do-tara) instrument named calascione is very much famous. It is also played with a plectrum.

11. **Palestine** — Veena type Harp and ten stringed Acor, Dulcimer - (EK-tara) are very popular.

12. **Ireland** — “The photograph of veena type harp is lying in the church of kilkenny city, which seems just like veena and the harp is kept in the players lap.”

*13. **Russia** — Two stringed Balalaika, five stringed Guzali, veena type Rilek and three stringed Torban are very common.
14. **North America** — One Eskimo tribe lives on its north west border. They believe that the instrument like two stringed Vac-a-tat and kush-tar-kar were given to them by some Indian tribe. These informations I got from Dr. Kaplin in Saskatoon, Canada who has a vast variety of world instruments with him.

When the civilizations vanish and are replaced by the new one, one is unable to find the old properties.

15. **Germany** — A Harp type instrument was prevalent named Zither. It had three strings and was played with finger nails. This name is also the synonym of sitar but because no written evidence is available, we can’t say that sitar is the same instrument which was once Zither.

**In Bible** — we find a mention of Kinnor, which is a beggers instrument these days. It might have some connection with Indian Kinnari veena which we find in old sculptures and paintings. So, as the time passes, civilizations change, the art and culture possessed by one civilization is taken over by another civilization and dynasty. The intermingling of different cultures then gives birth to a new culture. The Indian sitar has also come a long way.

In Greece, it is believed that when the Greeks attacked on the Northern sector of their own country in 16th century they brought with them three slaves, which had Cithess with them instead of weapons. This instrument was called Guzali also in their salabhb language.

Salaabh sangeet was popular in the whole Europe in 10th century.
The cithess or Guzali had three strings. So we see, though there was vast distance among places but Russian Guzali was popular in Greece also.

There is a beautiful sitar in Gandharva Mahavidhalaya- Bombay, which has an ostrich egg for the bowl, beautifully mounted with gold.

“Some sitars have peacock shaped heads and are called Peacock sitars.”

2.6 Conclusion

After studying the history of musical instruments of the world, I reached on the conclusion that EK-tara or EK tantri veena was the basic instrument and then it made a long journey in which it got so many modifications in shape size & techniques, by so many musicians in different places in different times.

The changes which is got are :-

1. The basic instrument i.e. EK-tantri veena had only one string.
2. The second string added to EK-tara or EK-tantri veena became Do-tara.
3. In third place- it got another modification and got one string added to it, it became tri-tantri veena.
4. One more string was added to tri-tantri veena, it became Tambur or Brahma veena with a little change in shape and size. It had four strings.
5. This instrument was added with frets on the finger board, twelve in number, and it was named kinnari veena.
6. When this instrument was decorated with 19 frets, it was called Dilruba.

7. A new modification was done by the Persians, they removed the frets and kept the four strings as they were on the Tambur, and named it Rabab.

8. It got another operation and was called Taus or Mayuri or Peacock Fiddle.

The EK-tantri veena had a finger board, a gourd and the string kept tight by one peg.

Most of the early Indian musical instruments are described in old sanskrit treatises, paintings and sculptures such as those of Ajanta, prove this even more conclusively.

Some details are given which at first sight seem to be unnecessary but much light is thrown upon several questions which are to be solved.

"Musical instruments were also introduced into Chinese music from India such as Tumbu veena or Tanpura which the chinese call Tanpu-la and the Taba or Arabic drum which became Ta-pu-laeh. Persian instruments were also introduced such as sitar which the chinese call Sa-tho-eul and the Sarangi which is called as Sa-long-tri etc. in chinese language."  

The Persian sitar with three strings is in use today also in Hyderabad and Jaipur. Since the time of Mohammden invasion, about a thousand years ago, some Arabian and persian instruments have been adopted in India, but their use is confined mostly to the Muslim musicians only.
References:

2. Ibid., p.443.
5. Pt. Sharangdev - *Sangeet Ratnakar*.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.


* Oral personal conversation with the Russian troops visiting Chandigarh, for cultural exchanges Tagore Theatre, Chd.


Illustrations
Yakshi, playing a Sapat/Tantri Veena
2nd Century B.C. Indian Museum Calcutta.

PLATE -

Andha figure, Second from left ancient era, 2nd century A.D. Indian Museum Calcutta

PLATE - 1.
Sarasvati, the Goddess of music and learning
Medieval, Lucknow State Museum, Mekhi Vema
Sculpture from temple Belur.

PLATE - 4.
PLATE 5. 32. The string drones: tun tune, ektar, tamboora
KINNARI VEENA

PLATE 6

PLATE 7

EK tanh
or
Tun Tun

Oriented printed
Lute of Persian Style

TAMBUR

THI-Tamburi Veena)

(Three strings)
MOVABLE FRETS
BEEN - SITAR

PLATE - 8.
PLATE - 9.

Tambura (Primitive)

Old Tambura (with ivory inlays)

The modern Tambura
PLATE - 10.

OLD VEENA

NORTH INDIAN VEENA

KACHCHAP VEENA

SOUTH INDIAN VEENA

MAKR VEENA
Taus or Esraj with a carved peacock at one end.

Peacock Mayuri
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

An old harp with 16 pegs.

Swar Mandal

Harp

Swar Mandal

PLATE II.
A Mughal painting - 1737-1757 A.D. Lalit Kala Academy.

PLATE - 12.
The Been—Rudra Veena, A contemporary portrait of Jeevan Khan, Beenkar of 18th cent. (courtesy Govind Vidyarthi) (courtesy Govind Vidyarthi).

PLATE 17.
Sarangi with (pegs and strings).

Tar Shehnai—gramophone and megaphone are attached to a string.

PLATE - 18
Sarinda
(Three Stringed)

Sarangi

PLATE - 19.
CHIKARA
(Three strings)

RABAB
(Four strings)

SARENGI

PLATE - 20
ZIA MOHIUDDIN DAGAR'S VEENA AND ITS HANDLING

KING (a Veena like instrument-folk Rajasthan)

PLATE – 21.
HANDLING OF VEENA

(By courtesy Shri Asad Ali Khan)

PLATE - 22.
Egyptian "tamboura"  
(Engel 1864:239)

Assyrian "tamboura"  
(Engel 1864:54)

Egyptian lute  
(Sachs 1940:102)

Egyptian lute  
(Sachs 1940: pl.v-c)

Karnatik Sitar  
(Day 1891: 107)

Tamboura Bouzourk  
(Engel 1864: 52)

PLATE - 24.
Indian Sitar

Saraswati Veena
(South India)

PLATE - 25 -
BIN (BEEN)
VICHITRA VEENA

PLATE - 26
SMALL SITAR

SOUTH INDIAN VEENA
(RUDRA VEENA)

SITAR (LARGE)
04 (SUNDARI)

SUR SRINGAR

PLATE - 27