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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN ART FORMS IN THE TEMPLES OF SOUTH INDIA WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO CHIDAMBARAM REGION**

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Abstract

To some extent musical instruments have been considered indispensable, for, even the gentle twang of the most primitive of the musical instruments with a single or double stringed and the drone of the pipe adds a unique melodic entity. The realization of these indispensable nature of musical instruments was so deep rooted, that the artistic genius of the craftsman, was forced to immortalise them in stone and other materials. Thus, several of the musical instruments have been bought into being during different periods. Music and dance have been the chief forms of religious expression in India. The origin of music in India is attributed to Gods and Goddesses and to mythological figures like Gandharvas and Kinnaras who figure in all the stories and legends connected with the science and practice of music.

Introduction

To some extent musical instruments have been considered indispensable, for, even the gentle twang of the most primitive of the musical instruments with a single or double stringed and the drone of the pipe adds a unique melodic entity. The realization of these indispensable nature of musical instruments was so deep rooted, that the artistic genius of the craftsman, was forced to immortalise them in stone and other materials. Thus, several of the musical instruments

have been bought into being during different periods. Music and dance have been the chief forms of religious expression in India. The origin of music in India is attributed to Gods and Goddesses and to mythological figures like Gandharvas and Kinnaras who figure in all the stories and legends connected with the science and practice of music.

Ancient Sanskrit literature and treatises on the science of music commonly refer to Indian music instruments. Ancient Indian sculptures refer to Indian

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musical instruments. Indian sculpture also depicts musical instruments with an amazing wealth of detail. Sanskrit treatises and literature on music containing references to musical instruments begin from about the 2nd century B.C. numerous varieties of musical instruments are shown in the ancient sculpture of Barhut, Sanchi, Mathura, Gandhara, Amaravati, Nagarjuna Konda reveal such details as the number of performers who normally participated in solo concerts, dance parties and musical processions, the types of instruments used as accompaniment and the postures in which the instruments were held and played.

In Barhut, Sanchi, etc., the artists of ancient India have sculptured various types of musical instruments in the scenes depicting the life of the Buddha and Jataka stories. Varieties of Vina, flutes, drums, pipes, conches, bells and gongs are represented in these ancient sculptures. The type of Vina which frequently occurs in these scenes, is like a harp in the shape of a bow, which is used as a handle. There is a boat-shaped resonator formed as a body of the instrument. There are a number of parallel strings fixed to the bow shaft, one over the other. This kind of instrument used to be played by men and women in a sitting position. There were other types of Vinas which were suspended from the arm and carried about. This type of Vina remained in use down to the time of the Guptas. We find the evidence of this kind of instrument from one of the golden coins of the Gupta period, now in the collection of National Museum, New Delhi. In this coin of Samudra Gupta, the harp Vina was called Parivadini. In ancient Tamil literature, this type of instrument is called Yazh. It appears to have been very popular in Southern India. This instrument is elaborately described in the text of Cilappatikaram. The kings of the early Tamil royal houses, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas, as well as several petty chiefs, patronised minstrels called Panas, who, with the Yazh on their shoulders, went from court to court singing beautiful songs describing the adventures of kings and nobles in war and love. The strings of the

Yazh were tuned to absolute pitch and the instrument itself played an open string either plucking by the fingers or striking with a plectrum. Each string was tuned after the note to which it was tuned. Different Ragas could be played by shifting the tonic.

In the plastic art of ancient India, we find two more types of Vinas, one is like a lute with an oval shaped resonator as the body of the instrument and a long neck similar to the modern Sarod or mandolin. The other one is the Ektara type which first appears in Indian art about the 7th century A.D. it is represented at Mahabalipuram in the open-air panel of the descent of the Ganga. It was this type of Vina which evolved from the 7th century onwards into the royal Bin of the north and the Vina of the South. The bow shaped Vina and the lute like Vina also continued to appear, side by side in the sculptural representation of ancient India until the 7th century A.D.

The sculptures of ancient India show many varieties of drum. In addition to ordinary cylindrical drums, there is a set of twin drums made up of a vertical drum and a horizontal one. The player sits in front of the drums and plays upon both. Triple drums are also found in some places. These were perhaps used for accompanying the music of different musical scales such as Shadja grama, Gandhara grama and Madhyama grama. One also comes across narrow-waisted drums which can be carried under the arm. These drums are played like the Damaru associated with Lord Siva who played it during the cosmic dance. There is the Shankha, provided at its mouth with a long tube to blow into. It is similar to the Dhavala Sankhu of the South. There are also representations of circular drums composed of skin stretched over a circular frame, examples of which are found all over India today; they are called by different names like Duff in the north, Dappu in the Telugu and Tambattam in Tamil Nādu.

The orchestra as we know it today is a recent development in the history of Indian music. It is called

‘Jantra-Sammelan’ or ‘Vadya Vrinda’ meaning group of musical instruments. However, small groups of instruments, usually five and not more than ten, seem to have been in existence in ancient times. These orchestra, composed of varieties of string, wind and percussion instruments, were played in places, processions, during worship, festival and in dance performances. Ancient sculptures depicted this theme frequently in bands and friezes. The instruments comprising such ensembles are usually the lute like Vina small drums, gongs, cymbals, pipes, flutes, pot-drums (Bhanda Vadya), twin drums and triple drums. Sabda Puja was a ritual in which the Buddha was worshipped with the sounds of musical instruments as offering. The emperor Ashoka always took a full orchestra with him while visiting pilgrimages and religious tours. Bana’ mentions the Sankha, the Dundubhi, the Muraja, the Venu, the Jallarika, the Tala and the Kahala, wherever a king used to go to his bath chambers (Snana bhavana), there was a “blare of Shringa accompanied by the din of Vinas, drums cymbals etc., resounding shrilly diverse tones mingled with the uproar of a multitude of singers.”

During the past centuries, a great number of instruments have fallen out of the race and gone in to disuse. Hundreds of string, wind and percussion instruments, have gone through the testing fire of times; some of them went into oblivion completely as they were unable to sustain the changing styles of our music from time to time. Others emerged in fuller glory, and developed in to our modern classical instruments. The remaining bulk stubbornly dragged on, in their primitive form through the centuries. We still find hundreds of their quaint instruments in use amongst the village folk and the aboriginal people of India.

The study of the archaeology of the Indian musical instruments portrayed in the sculptures of Sanchi, Bharhut, Amaravati, Gandhara, Nagarjuna Konda. Southern Indian temples of different periods

and in the paintings of Ajanta tries to visualise clearly, the huge variety of musical instruments that prevailed in the Sunga, Sathavahanas, Kushans, Ikshvaku, Gupta periods and different periods of Southern Indian dynasties. The review is midely amazing and charming. The representations of the dynamic arts of music on stone and in colour, though incidental, provide an interestingly study. They provide us with the knowledge of the use and development of musical instruments in different periods. Which can be known from the sculptural representations.

The Sungas rose to power in 2nd century B.C. and ruled till the 1st century B.C. and their art is represented mostly in the stupas of Barhut and Sanchi. The great masterpiece of this period are the sculptural reliefs represented on the reliefs and gateways of the stupas. The Barhut reliefs are older than the Sanchi sculptural figures.

In early Indian art, the depictions of cymbals are many. It appears in few sculptural reliefs of Barhut. The cymbals are simple and plain belonging to Ghana group. The early Indian sculptures do not seem to represent bells, but interestingly, at Barhut a panel illustrating ‘capture of the elephant by the monkeys’ portrays a monkey ringing the bell-clappers. At Barhut the conch with pipe occurs invariably as accompanied with Mrdangam. There is no representation of flute anywhere in Barhut reliefs. At Barhut there is a solitary representation of Patina kind drum in the reliefs illustrating ‘procession of the Monkey with the elephant’. There is an example of Mardala type of drum can be made out from the scene of ‘tickling the nose of a giant by the monkeys. At Barhut, the Muraja kind drum gets representation more than once. The Ankya Mrdangam and Urdhva Mrdangam get their depiction together and are seen being played by a single person at Barhut. Among the strangled instruments the bow-shaped instrument or harp occurs either as a solo instrument or an accompaniment to dancing on Barhut reliefs. It should be noted that the

representation of harp in the Barhut sculptures are comparatively less to that of the representations in the Sanchi relief. However, this may not be due to its less popularity at Barhut.

At Sanchi there is only a solitary representation of cymbal of the Ghana group in the whole range of reliefs. Clappers are the simplest percussion depicted in the Sanchi reliefs more than once. The conch is shown being played in the accompaniment of other instrument in royal processions at Sanchi. At Sanchi, two types of flutes (transverse or horizontal flute) and vertical flute or end flute are represented. Both the varieties are based on the principles of breath of air escaping through holes made in bamboo tube; they can be easily manufactured. At Sanchi Ankya Mrdangam is depicted quite a few times in the reliefs, Alingya Mrdangam is depicted once in the scene representing 'the Nagamuchalinda episodes. Urdha Mrdangam is depicted more than once. In the reliefs of Sanchi Muraja and Mardala type of drums are represented several times once. In early Indian reliefs Dundubhi type of instruments are represented in association with other musical instruments in a procession. At Sanchi the scene representing the 'transport of Relics' illustrates three sub-spherical shaped drums which may have represented as Dundubhis. The Sanchi reliefs depict the Patahatype of musical instrument at several places. Apart from the Patha in Sanchi reliefs, there is a rough representation of what looks like a small hand drum in the scene of 'royal visit'. Among the stringed instruments. The bow-shaped Vina occurs in the reliefs of Sanchi either as solo instrument or an accompaniment dancing or music party. At Sanchi the Guitar type of Vina or lute like Vina gets its representation only once in the reliefs, representing the scene 'the return of the perfectly accomplished Buddha to his native town'.

At Mathura the decline of the popularity of the harp is apparent. The best example of the bow-shaped harp can be seen in the sculpture portraying 'the music

party at Nemesia's feet'. At Mathura we don't find reference of drums in any sculptural representations. But in the Mathura sculptures there is a clear depiction of cymbals of the Ghana group. We also can see the representation of conch in Mathura sculptures.

The school of Gandhara was evidently influenced by the art of the Roman Empire, and some of its craftsmen have been westerners. The artists had skilfully depicted the varieties of musical instruments in the Gandhara sculptures at several places. The bow-shaped Vina occurs in the Gandhara sculptural reliefs either as a solo instrument or an accompaniment to dancing or music party. Generally, it is seen being played by lady attendants. In Gandhara sculptures the guitar type of Vina or lute is less represented as compared to the harp type. In the reliefs, the lute appears invariably either as an accompaniment to the instruments in a musical entertainment or as a solo instrument. The instrument lyre gets its lithographic delineation only in the Gandhara reliefs. Now here in the entire range of early Indian art, save the Gandhara specimens, the lyre is represented twice. However, the specimen noticed only in the Gandhara sculptures are evidently of Greek origin betraying unmistakable Hellenistic influence on the art of Gandhara as a rare musical instrument, lyre. Sambuca, again of the Greek origin gets its representation only in the Gandhara reliefs. This instrument can be identified as Sambuca, a triangular stringed instrument. Among the percussion groups few instruments have been represented in the sculptural forms at Gandhara. Ankya Mrdangam is one of them depicted in the sculptures of Gandhara. At Gandhara one of the panels showing the illustrations of two lady attendants embracing Mrdangams can be identified as Alingya Mrdangam. Another sculpture representing, 'Sleep of the women' at Gandhara reveals a Urdhvaka type of Mrdangam. Apparently, it had a single mouth on the top portion. Muraja type of drum is also represented in Gandhara sculptures. At Gandhara the 'Star-Riser Relief' depicts at Maradala type of drum being played by a drummer with his

fingers. We also find the depiction of Dundhubhi in the sculptures along with other instruments in a musical procession. The small hand drum with its broad edge, of wood or metal and the top covering probably of skin very much resembles the Greek Tympan. However, a more definite and clearer example of Greek Tympan is found in Gandhara sculptures. At Gandhara we get many of wind instruments appearing in the reliefs. The transverse or Horizontal Flute appears in the Gandhara reliefs as many as five times. Most probably the pan-pipe had been introduced in the art of Gandhara by the Greeks. There is a solitary representation of this pan-pipe of single tube in the Gandhara reliefs. At Gandhara a sculpture portraying 'Base ornamented with garland and Erotes' depicts a pair of cymbals as a solid instrument.

The Sathavahanas came to power in the 1st century B.C. and ruled till 2nd century A.D. and their masterpieces are represented mostly in the stupas of Amaravati. In one of the stupas there is a representation of cymbals with flat discs and thick threads of silk or wool inserted into a hole in the centre of the disc. At Amaravati there is also a depiction of Gong of the temple or any religious festivals. The depiction of transverse or horizontal flute occurs at several places at Amaravati. In Amaravati sculptures Ankya Mrdangam and Alingya Mrdangam are quite realistically represented more than once. A fine example of Mrdangamis quite realistically represented more than once. A fine example of Muraja gets its depiction at Amaravati on a Rail pillar. There is a representation of Mardala is quite unique and also an excellent depiction of Pataha at Amaravati, on a rail Pillar. At Amaravati the harp or the bow-shaped Vina appears either as a solo instrument or in accompaniment to dancing or music parties. We find a representation of lute like Vina, appears in the sculptures of later period at Amaravati. We also get an excellent example of guitar like or lute like Vina being played by a male musician.

The bow shaped Vina occurs in the Nagarjuna Konda more than once in the panels 'Sagata and Naga of the mango ferry', 'the Buddha visited by Indira and the minstrel Panchasika', the Bodhisattva descending from the heaven in the form of the white elephant.' At Nagarjuna Konda the lute like Vina gets its depiction twice in the reliefs. One of the panel portraying 'the transportation of the head dress to Heaven' reveals a guitar type Vina being played upon by a god. The other one portraying the 'night before renunciation' carved on an inscribed frieze slab, showing a female attendant is holding a lute on her lap and is playing upon it with plectrum. Apart from the harp and lute we get another type of Vina. It has a straight board. A solitary representation of this type occurs only in the Nagarjuna Konda sculptures. In a way it has some similarity to the modern 'Tambura'. At Nagarjuna Konda the panels show representation of numbers of percussion instruments. There is a panel illustrating 'the night before renunciation' shows a Mrdangam being played on by a female attendant. This can be identified as the Ankya typed Mrdangam. At Nagarjuna Konda the depiction of Urdhvaka type of Mrdangam is so many. In the Nagarjuna Konda sculptures the representation of Mardala variety occurs at Nagarjuna Konda. The panel illustrating 'the transportation of the head dress to heaven' reveals a Dundhubi at Nagarjuna Konda. The depiction of Patha in the sculptures of Nagarjuna Konda is more than once. At Nagarjuna Konda the flute is not represented anywhere in these reliefs. However, it does not mean that the people of the Ikshvaku period did not know the flute or its use. In fact, flute and lute were the most popular as can be known from the contemporary literature. The conch is represented thrice in the sculptures of Nagarjuna Konda. Among the solid instruments the clappers are realistically depicted at Nagarjuna Konda. One of the Nagarjuna Konda reliefs represents a pair of a cymbals possibly of some metal.

The bow-shaped harp continued to be popular in the Gupta period as is evident from one of the gold coins of that period, (now in the collection of National Museum). In the coin of Samudra Gupta the harp Vina is placed on the lap of the king sitting on a high-decked coach.

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