

## An Overview of Notation system during Samveda Period

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Musicologists maintain that the ancient music of India is the direct off-shoot of the Vedic music. Looking back into the complex history of Indian music, it may be inferred that different periods led to developments in music viz songs, dances and instruments from a chronological point of view. Leaving aside the pre-historic times, we can well assume that the Vedic period bore the first fruits of an organized and systematic musical culture that was simple yet dignified in character.

Vedic period is known to be the oldest written history of cultural heritage of ancient India. Vedic literature like Vedas, Brahmanas, Samhitas, Sutras, Shikshas and Pratishakhyas evidently prove the practice of music in Vedic times. Since there were only three vedas namely Rigveda, Samveda and Yazurveda we often find the word 'Treya' which represents the three vedas above. The Atharva-Veda evolved afterwards and was added in the list of 'Chaturveda' (chatur means four).

The Rigveda is the first book of mantras and the other three vedas were designed after the mantras of the Rigveda, differing in their aspects and applications. Hence the Rigveda attains a very high position in the domain of Vedic literature.

The music evolved out of the Richas of Rigveda added with notes was what was contained in Samveda. So the Samveda being the collection of Richas with tunes is known as the source of Indian music. The Samhita of Samveda is divided into two portions. The first one is called 'Archika' which is the collection of stanzas which are to be memorized. The other part is the 'Gana' or the song-book in which we find the real Samans as they are to be sung. Along with the text the musical notes are also given. Only vocal part is described in Sam-Samhita.

### Notation

The notation transmits the emotions portrayed by the composer. It helps in preserving the composition forever so that it could be played at any place or at any time at the same level. The another purpose of the notation is the idea of preserving music for posterity

through elaborate means of notation was inspired by the possibility of capturing music "as of like depiction".

### Notation: it's meaning

Notation is the representation of music through written symbols. It is used for increasing one's repertoire's in claiming greater acceptability instead of merely as a referent or as a written memory.

According to **Encyclopedia Britannica** :

*"A graphic method of representing sounds to the ear through the medium of the eye".*

According to **Nikhil Ghosh**:

*"Notation, as a musical term, means the system of writing music by signs and symbols to represent the pitch, duration, rise and fall of musical sounds".*

Notation, whether of words or music, serves several purposes, such as to permanentize expression, to make audible replication possible by one who had never heard the item, to permit the planned synchronization of component parts etc. All notational systems are, at best, approximations and generally require extensive knowledge about performance conventions in order to lead to an acceptable performance level.

Following are the important factors which contribute to the preservation of compositions:

1. The role of the interpreter and his rapport with notations.
2. The limits of communicability of notation and the extent of our understanding of these.
3. The present level of our understanding and assessment of our needs and purpose for notation.
4. Factors in the very nature of our Indian music which figure in determining the level of communicability of notation for us.
5. The level of our understanding of form in compositions; the extents to which a composition is static and conversely changing

and changeable.

6. The possibility for authenticity in versions and its relationship to preservation.

In ancient times, a primitive form of notation was in use. Because the signs and symbols were not fully developed, it could not successfully cover the music prevalent at those times. For example, it could not differentiate between different placements of swaras and their ornamentations such as Meend, Kana etc.

The Indian Notation system that we use today was developed in 20th century only. The main reason for such a late development of the Indian notation was that the Indian music system used to follow the tradition of Guru-Shishya strictly. In this system, each Gharana had its own speciality and it was expected to be kept as such. The Shishya was expected to memorize the music instead of taking it down in written form.

The Sam-Gana was noted down in notation using numerals. It is known to be the most ancient notation system of the world. According to **Encyclopaedia Britannica**:

*"It is probable that the earliest attempts at notation were made by the Hindus and Chinese from whom the principle was transferred to Greece."*

This notation system represented Indian vocal prevalent at that time. This can be logically deduced if we consider the following factors-

1. We find enough proofs that there was no solo playing of instruments.
2. The instruments were mostly for accompanying the vocal part.
3. The instruments were grouped together to play on special occasions.

Therefore, the logical interpretation of the facts above will be that the tunes they might have played were more or less similar to singing. The instrumental techniques were not developed at that time. Let us have a brief look on the notation system of Sam-Gana.

### Notation System in Sam-Gana

The notation system of Sam has been elaborately discussed in the book named *'The Ancient Mode of Singing Sam-Gana'* by **Sh. Laxman Shankar Bhatt Dravir** Samvedi in 1939.

We know that SamaGana was in descending order (Avrohi) with a 'Madhyam' as a starting note.

The notes were shown through numbers:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
म	ग	रे	स	नि	ध	प
M	G	R	S	N	D	
			P			

The 'Gandhara' and 'Nishada' of Sama-Grama were komal.

The Sam followed the rule of "प्रत्येकं षड्जभावेन". It means that every starting note should be treated as 'Sa'. For example, if Sama started from the 'number 2' which is 'KomalGa', it would be a 'Key-note' and is to be treated as 'Sa',

The signs and symbols of this notation system are explained below:

1. If a number was written above the word of the Richa along with another number at the side of the same word, then that word or note was sung in two notes e.g. "ओ<sup>२</sup>र" its notation would be 'म ग<sup>२</sup>' and from 'Sa' it would be 'स नि'

2. If "र" was written along with a number the Richa, i t m e a n s , t h e

note of that word is to be dragged/sung upto two matras it means-

स- स

हा ऽ उ

3. If 's' symbol is after the word, that word is to be sung in two matras e.g. "का ऽ ५ याँ" it means e.g.

का ऽ ५ याँ

स-धृध

4. '3' stands for the upper swara and 'क' stands for the lower swara.

5. ( - ) sign above the word means that it is to be sung in three matras.

6. ( ^ ) sign joins the former note of the word to the symbol's' (Avgraha)

7. '| |' the space between the two vertical lines are called 'Parva'. The Parva has to be sung in one breath only.

## 8. Before every Sam 'Pranav'(ओ३म्) is to be sung

Let me take one example of one mantra and show it in notation.

२३	१	२	३१२	३ २	३ १ २
अग्र	आ	याहि	वीतये	गृणानो	हव्यदातये
	१	२२			३१२
	नि	होता	सत्सि		बर्हिषि ॥

(Sam 1.1.1.1.)

The whole mantra in Sam Notation is as follows:

४ ^ ३	४	२२ २ ११^
ओ ऽ ५ म् ॥	ओग्राह ॥	आयाहि ऽ ३ वोइतोया ऽ२ इ ॥
१	१ २ २२	१ -^ १^
तो या ऽ २ इ ॥	गृणानोह ॥	व्यदातोयाऽ२इ ॥ तोयाऽ२ इ ॥
१ २ २ १ ^	१ ३	॥ ५ २२ ३^ ॥
नाइहोतासा ऽ२३ ॥	त्सा ऽ २इ बा ऽ २ ३ ४ ओहोबा ॥	हीऽ २ ३ ४ षी ॥

In modern notation

४ ^ ३ ओ ऽ ५ म् स -निरे	४ ओग्राह स सस	२२ २ १ १^ आयाहि ऽ ३ वोइतोया ऽ २ इ ग-ग-ग-रे म/मम-गग
१-^ तोया ऽ २ इ मम-गग	१ २ २२ गृणानोह म मगग	२१ -^ व्य दातो या ऽ २ इ ग म म-गग
१ -^ तो या ऽ २ इ म म-गग	१ २२ १ ^ ना इ होतासा ऽ २ ३ म मग-मम-गरे	
१ ^ त्सा ऽ २ इ म -गग	१ ॥ ५ २२ ३ ॥ बा ऽ २३ ४ ओहोबाही ऽ २ ३ ४ षि रे-ग-रे-स-नि-नि-निरे-ग-रे-स-नि	

But after Sam-Gana the development of the notation system came to a halt. The main problem was illiteracy due to which they could not write or read the notation and learn from it. Apart from that the Indian musicians did not believe in writing down their compositions due to Guru-Shishya tradition.

Hence it is a wrong notion that notation system was not prevalent in Indian music during ancient times. This

is further proved via manuscript found in the library of Tanjore in which a notation was found in Hindi alphabet which was even before the Vedic period. During Samveda it was further developed using numbers to represent the music prevalent in that period. Therefore, keeping all these facts in mind, it would not be wrong to say that notation system of Samveda indeed the most ancient notation system known to the world.

## References

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