

Veena and Other Ancient Musical Instruments of India

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In our [previous issue](#), we had brought you a detailed feature on the Veena and other ancient stringed musical instruments of India. As promised earlier, we now bring you the second part of the article, focusing on the ancient wind and percussive instruments of India. We are pleased by your positive response and feedback for the previous article and hope you enjoy this one as well.

Wind Instruments of India

We start our journey by exploring the most ancient wind instruments of India.

Pungi/Been

The Pungi, also commonly referred to as the Been, is one of the oldest wind instruments. It is predominantly played by snake charmers in India and Pakistan. Originally emerging as accompaniment to Indian folk music, it enjoys an important place in Indian art, culture and religion even in the present day.

This instrument includes a mouth-blown air reservoir, which is made from dried bottle gourd. The neck is curved and at the other end, two reed or bamboo pipes are connected to one another. One of the pipes has seven holes - the player uses this to play the melody. The sound lasts as long as the player does not take pauses.

The pungi, which is still a major part of Indian folk music and street shows, is also considered to be one of the ways by which one can communicate with the divine.

Flute/Venu/Bansuri



Flute

The flute falls into the woodwind category. This is a reedless wind instrument, which produces sound from the flow of air via a small aperture. The person playing a flute is generally referred to as a flautist, flutist or rarely, fluter or flutenist.

Flutes are ancient musical instruments, dating to over 40,000 years ago. These have been an integral part of Indian classical music, both Hindustani and Carnatic. Lord Sri Krishna is always closely associated with the flute.

Indian Flutes

The bamboo flute, which is largely used in Indian music, was developed independently of the Western flute. These are simple as compared to the latter and are keyless as well. Indian flutes are mainly of two types, viz. the Venu and the Bansuri.

Venu

The Venu or Pullanguzhal as it is called, has eight finger holes and is largely played in South Indian Carnatic music. Most Carnatic musicians use the cross-fingering technique. At the beginning of the 20th Century, these flutes featured only seven finger holes. The standard fingering technique was developed by Sharaba Shastri of the Palladam School. The quality of the venu depends much upon the type of bamboo used to create it. Experts agree that the best bamboo can be found in the Nagercoil area in South India.

Method of Playing

While playing the Indian transverse flute, the fingers of both hands are used to open and close the holes. There is a small opening to blow into and eight playing holes. This instrument comes in various sizes.

With the right kind of fingering and blowing, the venu is capable of producing two and half

octaves. Sliding the fingers on and off the holes helps in reproducing gamakas more clearly, thereby improving the quality of the melody rendered.

In Mythology

The Venu finds prominent mention in Indian mythology and folklore. It is listed as one of the 3 originally indigenous instruments in this country; the others being the veena and the mridangam. The veena-venu-mridangam trio hence enjoys a very important place in Indian art and culture.

Lord Krishna is usually depicted playing the venu. This is why he is often addressed as Venugopala. He is believed to be playing the flute in order to encourage the process of Creation in this world. However, there is no particular name for the flute that the Lord plays.

It is said that Krishna used to play so melodiously that all the Gopis (cowherding women) would get mesmerized by his playing and would leave everything they were doing and simply to rush to his side. Radha and Krishna are often depicted together, with him playing his flute and her standing by his side; dancing to his tunes; or just helping him play, by holding the instrument for him.

Famous Venuists

Some of the most famous venuists from the past and present include Sri T.R. Mahalingam, Dindigul S.P. Natarajan, Sri. T. Viswanathan (disciple of Veena Dhanammal and brother of Balasaraswati), Sri Flute Mali, Sri N. Ramani, Prapancham Sita Raman, Sikkil Sisters Kunjumani and Neela, Sikki Mala Chandrasekhar, Sri K.S. Gopalakrishnan and Sri S. Shashank.



Radha Mesmerised by the Sound of Krishna's Flute

Bansuri

The bansuri is predominantly used in North Indian or Hindustani music. It is made from a single hollow shaft of bamboo and features six or seven finger holes. Also associated with cowherds

and a pastoral environment, this instrument plays a central part in depicting the love between Krishna and Radha; as also the Rasleela, or the Divine Dance of Radha, Krishna and the Gopis. Additionally, references to the bansuri can be found in Buddhist paintings from about 100 CE. It is believed that not only Radha and the Gopis, but even animals used to get attracted to the melodies arising from the Lord's flute.

Construction

The word 'bansuri' originates from the 2 Sanskrit words, 'bans' (bamboo) and 'sur' (melody). The typical bansuri is about 14 inches in length, but could vary between less than 12 inches (muralis) to nearly 40 inches (shankha bansuris). It was traditionally used as a soprano instrument. The bass variety, which was popularized by Pannalal Ghosh, is now mostly being used in Hindustani music. Eventually, what was generally used in folk music, came to be used in mainstream Indian classical music.

In order to be suitable for playing, the bamboo used to create a bansuri needs to be thin-walled and straight, with a uniform cross section. The best quality of bamboo can be found in the forests of Assam and Kerala. The bamboo is then seasoned, so as to let it strengthen.

After this, a cork stopper is inserted to block one end and the blowing hole is burnt in. Once all the other holes are burnt in as well, the bamboo is dipped in a solution of antiseptic oils, is cleaned and dried. Its ends are then bound with silk or nylon threads, both for ornamental and protective purposes.

Longer bansuris with a larger bore feature a lower pitch and the slimmer, shorter ones are shriller. Since this is a natural woodwind instrument, it is quite delicate and needs to be maintained with great care.

Famous Bansuri Players

Some of the most famous bansuri players include Pannalal Ghosh, Raghunath Prasanna, Vijay Raghav Rao, Hariprasad Chaurasia, Nityanand Haldipur, Rajendra Prasanna, Ronu Majumdar and Pravin Godkhindi.

Nadaswaram

The Nadaswaram, alternatively referred to as nagaswaram or nathaswaram, is a double-reed wind instrument, which originated in Tamil Nadu and is widely used all over South India. Considered to be the world's loudest acoustic instruments; also one of the most difficult instruments to play; it is similar to the North Indian Shehnai. It is, however, much longer and larger than the latter. Due to its sheer intensity of volume, it is mostly preferred to be an outdoor instrument, as against being an indoor, concert-type instrument.

In Tamil culture, the Nadaswaram is considered to be a 'mangala vaadyam' or auspicious instrument. Hence, it is played in almost all South Indian temples, while conducting temple processions, at weddings, and other major ceremonies as well. The Nadaswaram finds mention in the ancient treatise, the Silappathikaram. Here, a similar instrument is referred to as the 'Vangiyam'.

This instrument is usually accompanied by a percussive instrument called the 'Thavil'. Another accompaniment used along with the nadaswaram is the 'Otthu', which acts like a sort of drone to keep sustaining the sound. The Otthu is played by an assistant junior musician, at the main player's side.

Construction

The nadaswaram comprises three major parts, namely, kuzhal, thimiru and anasu. It has a conical structure, which gradually curves to enlarge towards the lower end, thereby forming a small speaker-like shape at the end. The top portion has a mel anaichu or metal staple, into which is inserted the kendai or metallic cylinder, which houses the mouthpiece, made of reed. Several spare reeds are attached as well. A tiny ivory or horn needle is attached as well, in order to clear the reed of saliva or other impurities, thereby allowing for free flow of sound. The keezh anaichu is a metallic bell, which forms the bottom of the instrument.

Traditionally, the nadaswaram is made from a tree called aacha. However, nowadays, artisans use a variety of other materials, such as sandalwood, bamboo, copper, brass, ebony and ivory. Aged wood is considered best to craft a nadaswaram - sometimes, the wood procured from old demolished houses is used.

The nadaswaram has seven playing holes and five additional ones at the bottom, which is used to manipulate tone. Since there are seven holes played with seven fingers, it is also referred to as the 'Ezhil'. It covers a range of two and half octaves. Semi-tones and quarter-tones are produced by adjusting the pressure and intensity of the air-flow into the pipe.

Incidentally, there is a smaller version of the nadaswaram, which is widely used in folk music. This is referred to as the 'mukhavina'.

Famous Players

Some of the most famous nadaswaram players include Karukurichi Arunachalam Pillai, Thiruvavadudurai Rajaratnam Pillai, Thiruvengadu Subramania Pillai, Andankoil A.V. Selvarathnam Pillai, Thiruvizha Jayashankar, Semponnarkoil Brothers SRG Sambandam and Rajanna, Sheik Chinna Moulana and Namagiripettai Krishnan.

Various foreign musicians developed a fascination for the nadaswaram and some even performed the instrument live and in recordings. These personalities include composer Lewis Spratlan, musicians such as Charlie Mariano, Vinny Golia J.D Parran, William Parker and

German saxophonist Roland Schaeffer.

Shehnai

The Shehnai, also referred to as shenai, shahnai or simply, mangal vadya, is common in North India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is a quadruple-reed woodwind instrument, which has a wooden flared bell at the lower end. The sound it produces puts it in the category of an auspicious instrument, which can sanctify the atmosphere. Hence, like the nadaswaram, the shehnai too is used during temple processions, marriages and other sacred ceremonies conducted in North India.

Construction

The shehnai is a tubular instrument, which broadens into a sort of bell at the lower end. It usually has about six to nine holes and makes use of one set of quadruple reeds. Melodies are played on it by controlling the breath. This instrument admits of a range of two octaves.

Occasionally, two shehnais are tied together and played to create an instrument similar to the Greek Aulos.

History



Lord Ganesha Playing Shehnai

Some experts believe that the shehnai evolved from the basic pungli or been. Yet others aver that the name 'shehnai' originated from the words 'sur' and 'nal', which literally mean, 'tune' and 'pipe', respectively.

Shehnai players were most popular all over North India, Goa and the Konkan region. The shehnai players, called Vajantri, would serve by playing in the temples of these regions. Each one of them were allotted lands for services thus rendered.

Famous Artists

Notable shehnai artists include Bismillah Khan, Anant Lal, Ali Ahmed Hussain Khan, Daya Shankar and Ali Hussain.

Bowed Instruments of India



Rajput Sarangi Player

Sarangi

The Sarangi is an ancient Indian bowed, short-necked, fretless instrument. Also used in Nepal; especially all over the Western part of Nepal; this forms a vital part of Hindustani classical music. Its timbre and resonance makes it sound very close to the human voice.

History

Some experts believe that the word 'sarangi' comes from the two words, 'saar' (essence) and 'ang' (part of the song or melody). According to folk etymology, the sarangi derived its name from the term, 'sol rang', which literally means, 'a hundred colors'. This indicates its versatility, flexibility and capability to reproduce just about any melody, gamaka or meend (ornamentation) that the human voice can create. The word 'sarang' has multiple meanings in Sanskrit and so, there is no one definitive reason for the instrument to have gotten this name.

Structure

The sarangi is carved from a single block of red cedar wood. It has a box-like shape with three hollow chambers, namely, pet (stomach), chhaati (chest) and magaj (head). It is usually about 2 feet in length and about 6 inches wide. One can find variations in size though. The strong bridge supports heavy sympathetic steel or brass strings and 3 main gut strings, which pass through it. The gut strings are bowed with a heavy horsehair bow - the movement of this is controlled with the fingernails, cuticles and the surrounding flesh. Extremely difficult to

master, this instrument is also painful to play.

Besides these, the sarangi features 35-37 sympathetic strings, which are divided into 4 'choirs', having two sets of pegs. On the inside, there is the chromatically tuned row of 15 tarabs and on the right is the diatonic row of 9 tarabs. Each of these support a full octave, plus 2-3 extra notes, as and when needed.

Owing to the extreme difficulty presented by the instrument, the art of sarangi playing is slowly fading out; with very few artists in existence today. However, some modern performers and composers have made use of this wonderful instrument in their works. Some of the most famous names include A.R. Rahman, Yuvan Shankar Raja, Surinder Sandhu, Howard Shore, Nitin Sawhney, Robert Miles, Talvin Singh and Ahsan Ali.

Dilruba

The Dilruba, a very ancient musical instrument, is somewhat of a cross between the sitar and the sarangi. Very much similar to the Esraj and the Mayuri Veena, the main difference lies in the shape of the resonators and the way the sympathetic strings attach themselves to the instrument. This is a popular instrument in Northwest India and can be found predominantly in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The neck of the dilruba consists of about 18 strings. It is tuned similar to the sitar and much like the latter, most of the playing is done on one main stings. It is a fretted instrument, with the sympathetic strings helping the player sustain the mood the melody as he plays.

Method of Playing

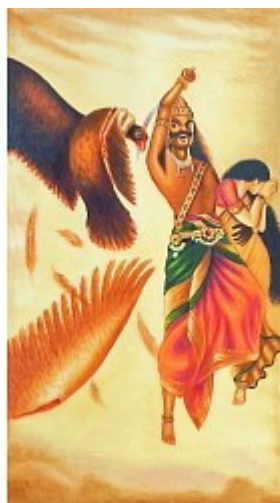
The dilruba, being a bowed instrument, is played like the sarangi. It is bowed with the right hand and played using fingers of the left hand. While some schools mainly use the index finger and the middle finger as the secondary finger, like playing the sitar; other schools give more precedence to the use of the middle finger, treating the index finger as subsidiary.

The technique of playing meend is different from the sitar. While the sitar player usually pulls the string along the frets to play semitones and quartertones, the dilruba player merely slides his fingers on the concerned fret, in order to achieve the same sound.

Ravanahatha

The Ravanahatha, alternatively referred to as the Ravana Hasta Veea, Ravanahattha, Ravanhatta and Ravanastron, is one of the most ancient bowed instruments of India. This was one popular in Western India and Sri Lanka as well. Incidentally, this instrument is believed to have inspired the creation of the violin and the viola, at a much later time.

In Mythology



Ravana Slays Jatayu

The Sinhalese believe that the Ravanahatha originated among their Hela civilization, during the rule of their King, Ravana. In India, this instrument is believed to exist since 5000 BC. In fact, an instrument, which closely matches this description, can still be found in the remote villages of Rajasthan. It also finds mention in the tales of Ravana, in the epic Ramayana.

Legend has it that Ravana, who was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, used to play this instrument in order to please and appease his Lord. It is said that, after Rama defeated and killed Ravana, Hanuman picked up the Ravanahatha and returned with it to North India. From India, it traveled to the Middle East, Europe and the rest of the Western World; then finally giving rise to the violin and the viola in their present form.

A study of the history of Medieval India reveals that the kings and royal princes, who were also patrons of music, helped increase the popularity of the Ravanahasta, throughout Rajasthan and Gujarat. Furthermore, the Sangit tradition of Rajasthan encouraged princes; and later; even the royal ladies, to learn to play the instrument.

Construction

The bowl of the ravanahatha, which is made of coconut shell, is covered with goat hide. Then a dandi or a stem, made of bamboo, is attached to this shell. The 2 main playing strings are made from steel and horsehair, respectively. These are attached to the instrument with two huge pegs, around which they are wound.

Apart from the 2 main strings are 8-12 sympathetic strings, which are attached to smaller pegs. The bow is slightly concave and, to its end, are fitted bells, which are meant to provide rhythmic accompaniment.

Percussive Instruments of India



Ganesha Playing the Mridangam

Mridangam

The Mridangam is one of the most ancient percussive instruments of India and serves as primary rhythmic accompaniment for South Indian Carnatic music; in Bharatanatyam and other classical dance forms; and in other forms such as Yakshagana as well. In a Carnatic performance, the mridangam is given a significant place for playing solo - this is referred to as the 'tani' or 'tani avartanam'. Here, the mridangist plays his or her solo, alternating with the other upapakkavadyams present onstage. After each plays alternating solo pieces that gradually taper in length, they all come together for the grand finale, which ends in a crescendo of sound and rhythm.

Besides India, it is predominantly used in parts of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and several other countries of the West as well. It is often accompanied by upapakkavadyams (secondary instruments) such as the ghatam, kanjira and morsing.

The mridangam gave rise to the elaborated and complex tala (rhythm) system of Carnatic music. Earlier, it was used only as accompaniment. However, today, it plays the central role in rhythmic ensembles such as a Tala Vadya Kutcheri (featuring mainly percussive instruments playing together; sometimes using vocal or instrumental music as accompaniment).

History

In early Tamil culture, this instrument was known as the 'tannumai'. The word mridangam is derived from the two Sanskrit words, 'mrida' (earth or clay) and anga (limb or part). Earlier, mridangams were made of the above-mentioned materials. Today, it is made mainly from wood of the jackfruit tree.

The Mridangam finds a prominent place in several ancient Hindu temples, sculptures and

paintings, especially all over South India. Deities such as Ganesha and Nandi are believed to have played the mridangam and the maddalam to provide rhythmic accompaniment for Shiva's tandava (Cosmic dance). Hence, this is also terms as the Deva Vadyam; the Divine Instrument. Incidentally, this instrument was also played at the start of war, along with others such as murasu, tudi and parai, as it was believed to be sacred and had the power to protect the king and his army.

Construction

The mridangam is a double-sided drum, the body of which is hollowed out from jackfruit wood, which is usually about an inch thick. The two open ends are covered with goatskin and laced together with leather straps, tying around the circumference of the drum. These straps are held in place under high tension, so as to stretch the membrane; thus resonating the instrument when struck.

The two membranes are different, so as to produce bass and treble sounds. The smaller membrane produces a shriller sound when struck and the wider aperture helps produce sounds of lower pitch. The goatskin covering the smaller end is called 'valanthalai' or 'bala bhaaga' and features a black disk in the center. This is made of rice flour, ferric oxide powder and starch. This dark tuning paste is referred to as the 'saadam' or 'karanai' and gives the instrument its metallic sound. The bass end, on the other hand, is known as the 'thoppi' or 'eda bhaaga'. The combination of these two different ends creates the production of the instrument's unique harmonic structure.

Method of Playing

Just before a performance, the membrane covering the wider aperture is made moist with a little semolina paste applied onto its center. This helps the bass end resonate to its full power. The mridangist then tunes the instrument, by manipulating the leather straps. The straps are struck with a heavy object (usually a stone) or sometimes a hammer-like tool. A 'pullu' or wooden peg is sometimes placed between the stone and the mridangam, in order to achieve maximum tension of the straps.

Striking the periphery of the right membrane in the direction of the hull raises the pitch, while striking it in the opposite direction lowers it. Since the leather straps are interwoven across the length of the instrument, adjusting the tension on one side can affect the tuning of the other side as well.

Once the instrument is tuned, the mridangist places it parallel to the floor, resting upon his or her right foot and ankle. A right-handed mridangist places the smaller membrane on his or her right and the larger membrane on the left side. This traditional playing posture is switched to the other side for left-handed players.

Famous Mridangists

Some of the most famous mridangists from past and present include Nagercoil Ganesa Iyer, Palana Subramaniam Pillai, Palghat Mani Iyer, Palghat R. Raghu, Mavelikkara Velukkutty Nair, Vellore G. Ramabhadran, Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman, T.S. Nandakumar, Karaikudi Mani, Yella Venkateswara Rao, Trichy Sankaran, T.V Gopalakrishnan, Mannargudi Easwaran, Thiruvapur Bakthavathsalam and Thiruvapur Vaidyanathan.

Tabla

The Tabla, like the mridangam, is a membranophone percussion instrument. It is used as primary accompaniment in North Indian Hindustani classical music. Besides India, it can be found in Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka as well. A tabla player is commonly referred to as a tabalchi.

This instrument consists of a pair of hand drums of different sizes and therefore, different timbres. The main drum is referred to as a table or dayan (literally, "right") and is played with the tabalchi's dominant hand. This is conical in shape and is made from wood. Its tightly fitted skin helps in the production of its distinctive pitch, when struck.

The larger drum is lower in pitch and is called bayan (literally, "left"). It consists of a bowl-shaped metal shell. Because the skin covering it is looser, it enables the tabalchi to manipulate the sound while playing.

History

There is mention of the tabla right from the Vedic period in India. Some believe that its construction was inspired from the mridangam, and that the latter was actually halved, to create the two drums of the tabla. However, some others believe that the tabla was in existence far before the mridang came into the scene. The Sangita Ratnakara, one of the most important treatises on music, written by Sarangadeva, speaks of an instrument closely resembling the tabla. Ancient Hindu temples carvings both in North and South India, dating back to 500 BCE, show double-hand drums, looking very much like the tabla.

Legend has it that the instrument was first invented by the Turkish Sufi poet, Amir Khusro, during the 13th Century. He felt the need for a rhythmic instrument, which would also support the complex rhythmic structures of his compositions. However, there is no official mention of this in his writings on music.

Construction

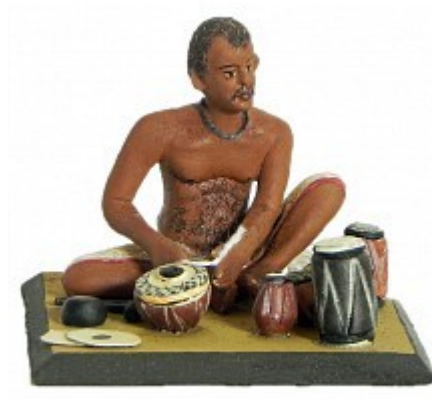


Tabla Maker

The smaller drum is usually made from teak and rosewood, which is hollowed out to about half of its depth. This drum is tuned to a particular pitch that complements the singer's melody. Cylindrical blocks of wood, called ghatta, are inserted between the strap and the shell, thus enabling the player to tune them to his or her preference. Fine tuning can be achieved by striking vertically on the head, using a small hammer-like tool. The larger drum can be made of a variety of materials, including brass, copper, aluminum or steel. Earlier, wood or clay was used, though this was found to be much less durable.

Both drums are covered with a head made from goat or cow skin. An outer skin is overlaid over the main skin - this suppresses some of the overtones. These two skins are held in place by means of a complex woven strap braid, which also sustains the tension on the shell. The head of each drum has a tuning paste in the center, called the syahi, which is made using several layers of paste made from rice or wheat starch and a black powder procured by mixing various ingredients. Each of these drums is positioned onto a circular ring, called chutta or guddi, for stability and balance. This is made from plant fiber or similar material, wrapped in thick cloth.

Unlike Mridangists and Pakhawaj players, who play sideways and largely use the full palm for playing; Tabalchis use a complex finger tip and hand technique, playing it from the top. This allows the tabalchi to create different types of sounds while playing. Needless to say, finger technique slightly varies from gharana (music school) to gharana.

Famous Tabalchis

Some of the most noteworthy tabalchis of the past and present include Ahmedjaan Thirkwar, Bapu Patwardhan, Alla Rakha Khan, Hamid Hussein, Shankar Ghosh, Bickram Ghosh, Zakir Hussain, Sharda Sahai, Trilok Gurtu, Nayan Ghosh, Talvin Singh, Alope Dutta, Vijay Ghate and Anuradha Pal.

Dholak

The dholak is a two-headed hand-drum, used mainly in the folk music of India. It is somewhat similar to the larger Punjabi Dhol and the smaller dholki. Besides India, similar instruments can be found in Pakistan, Suriname, Jamaica, Guyana, the Fiji islands, Sri Lanka and Netherlands as well. Due to its firm rooting in folk music, it is fairly simple and lacks the advanced tuning and playing techniques of other percussive instruments such as the mridangam, tabla and the pakhawaj. The drum is pitched depending on its size.

Construction

The smaller end of the dholak is created with goatskin - this is also the shriller end. The bigger surface, made of buffalo skin, is more bass and gives a lower pitch. The shell is sometimes crafted out of sheesham wood. However, usually this instrument is made from cheaper wood, such as mango. Dholaks and dholkis in Sri Lanka are made from hollowed out coconut palm stems.

Usage

The dholak is very widely used, almost all over North, Eastern and Western India, during functions and festivities. It is mostly used in the Bhangra, the sprightly folkdance of Punjab; in Lavani, the vibrant folkdance form of Maharashtra; during bhajan, kirtan (devotional song and dance) and qawwali sessions as well.

This instrument prominently features in pre-wedding festivities - children and women dance to ladies singing and playing the dholak. Additionally, it is also used in filmi sangeet (music) and at baithaks (informal chamber music sessions).

Panchavadyam

Panchavadyam, which literally means, "orchestra of five instruments", is a temple art form that developed in Kerala. The five instruments included in this unique ensemble are timila, maddalam, ilathalam, idakka and kombu. Of these, only the kombu is a wind instrument. All the rest are percussive instruments.

The panchavadyam features a pyramid-like rhythmic structure, which steadily increases in tempo, with a directly proportionate decrease in the number of beats per tala cycle. Though it is a temple art form, this does not relate to any particular temple ritual - the artists too use personal improvisation to add more shades to the performance.

Spanning about two hours, this orchestral performance consists of both composed and improvised parts. Like in Panchari and other types of chenda melam, the Panchavadyam too features artists lined up opposite each other, forming an oval-shaped pattern.

Mainly developed by the late maddalam artists such as Venkichan Swami, Madhava Warriar, Annamamada Achutha Marar and Chengamanad Sekhara Kurup, later actively promoted by idakka maestro Pattirath Sankara Marar, the present style of panchavadyam came into existence in the 1930s.

Temples Featuring Panchavadyam

One can find several temples in Kerala, which traditionally host panchavadyam performances. Major festivals featuring these ensembles are Thrissur Pooram (the "Madhathil Varavu" is a big event here), Nadappura Panchavadyam at the Vadakknacheri Siva Temple, Pariyanampatta pooram, Kaladi Panchavadya Utsavam, Vayilliamkunnu Pooram, Tirumandhamkunnu pooram purappadu, Tripunithura Sree Poornathrayeesa Aarattu, Tripunithura Thamaramkulangara Makaravilakku, Thiruvona Mahotsavam at Sree Vamanamoorthy Temple, and Thrikkakara and Cherpulassery Ayyappan Kavu Ulsavam.

Prominent temples such as the Perum Thrikkovil at Ramamangalam, the ancient Pallasana Meenkulathi Bhagavathi Temple, Chottanikkara, Irinjalakuda, Vaikom, Ambalapuzha, Odakkali, Perumbavur, Pazhur, Chengamanad, Elavoor, Chennamangalam, Kottakkal Viswambhara Temple, Kottakkal Pandamangalam Sreekrishna Temple, Chembuthara Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple and so on, regularly host panchavadyam events during their important festivals.

Institutions Imparting Training in Panchavadyam

The art of playing in a panchavadyam ensemble is one that requires much training and effort on the part of the artists involved. Some of the most well-known institutions imparting training in this art form in Kerala include Kerala Kalamandalam and Kshetra Kalapeetham in Vaikom. Sri Thrikkampuram Krishnankutty Marar from Ramamangalam, a famed artist himself, trained several others in the art. In fact, it is said that most of the panchavadyam ensembles in Kerala would feature at least one of his direct disciples.

While Panchavadyam largely remains a temple tradition yet, it is slowly gaining prominence outside temples those precincts as well. One can now watch it being performed at non-religious events as well, including at Indian and international cultural events; in order to welcome political and other dignitaries and so on.

Footnote

We have touched upon only a few of the prominent musical instruments from India. There are numerous more we have not enlisted here. In addition India boasts of countless folk or tribal music instruments which, though primitive and simple in nature, are none the less musical. India is full of vivid sounds and these musical instruments are the tools with which these sounds are given form and presented to the world.

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