

String Instruments (Tantuvadya)

1.Sitar



The **sitar** is a plucked string instrument widely used in Hindustani classical music. It has a long neck with movable frets and a large resonating gourd. The sitar produces a distinctive twangy and resonant sound due to its **sympathetic strings**, which vibrate along with the main strings. It typically has **six or seven main strings** and **eleven to thirteen sympathetic strings**. The player plucks the strings using a **metal plectrum (mizrab)** worn on the index finger. The **meend (glide between notes)** is a key feature of sitar playing, creating fluid and expressive melodies. The sitar evolved from ancient Indian instruments like the veena and became popular in the Mughal era. It gained worldwide recognition through **Pandit Ravi Shankar**, who introduced it to Western audiences and collaborated with musicians like **The Beatles' George Harrison**. Today, the sitar remains an essential instrument in **Indian classical, fusion, and world music**.

2.Veena



The **veena** is one of the oldest Indian musical instruments, deeply associated with **Carnatic music** and Hindu mythology. It has a **large, hollow wooden body**, a **long neck with fixed frets**, and **seven strings**. The veena is played by **plucking the strings with a plectrum** while pressing the frets to create notes. There are different types of veenas, such as the **Rudra Veena**, used in Hindustani classical music, and the **Saraswati Veena**, prominent in South India. The veena is often associated with **Goddess Saraswati**, the deity of wisdom and music. The instrument requires intricate finger movements and a deep understanding of melody and rhythm. It produces a **rich, sustained sound** that allows for **gamaka (ornamental notes)**, a crucial aspect of Indian music. Many legendary musicians like **Veena Dhanammal** and **S. Balachander** have mastered the veena and contributed to its prominence in classical performances.

1. Sarod



The **sarod** is a **fretless string instrument** known for its **deep, introspective tone** and its ability to produce intricate **microtonal slides (meend)**. Unlike the sitar, the sarod has a **metal fingerboard**, which allows players to glide smoothly between notes. It has **four main playing strings**, two drone strings, and **sympathetic strings** that enhance its resonant quality. The sarod is played with a **coconut shell plectrum (jaba)** that creates sharp, clear notes. It is a central instrument in **Hindustani classical music**, often used for long, meditative renditions of ragas. The sarod was developed from ancient Persian and Indian lutes and became prominent in the **18th century**. **Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan** are among the most renowned sarod players. The instrument requires immense skill due to its **smooth, gliding notes and intricate fingerwork**. The sarod's **soulful, deep sound** makes it one of the most expressive Indian instruments.

🥁 Percussion Instruments (Avanaddha Vadya)

4. Tabla



The **tabla** is one of the most famous Indian percussion instruments, used in **Hindustani classical, folk, and contemporary music**. It consists of **two hand-played drums**: the **Dayan** (smaller drum) and the **Bayan** (larger drum). The Dayan is usually made of wood, while the Bayan is made of metal or clay. The tabla is played with **intricate finger techniques**, allowing for **rapid, complex rhythms**. It has a **black tuning spot (syahi)** in the center of each drum, which helps produce different tones. Tabla compositions, known as "**taals**," follow rhythmic cycles that range from **simple 4-beat patterns to complex 16-beat cycles**. The tabla is often used for solo performances and as accompaniment for vocalists and instrumentalists. **Ustad Zakir Hussain** is one of the most famous tabla players in the world. The instrument is an essential part of **Indian, Pakistani, and Afghan music traditions** and has been used in **fusion and world music**.

2. Mridangam



The **mridangam** is the primary **percussion instrument in Carnatic music**, used for rhythm accompaniment in concerts. It is a **barrel-shaped, double-headed drum** made from **jackfruit wood** and covered with **leather membranes**. The mridangam is played by striking both heads with the hands, using different finger techniques to produce distinct tones. It provides the essential rhythmic foundation (tala) for classical South Indian music. The drum's construction allows for deep, resonant bass sounds and sharp, high-pitched tones. The playing technique involves intricate **solkattu (rhythmic syllables)** that define different rhythmic cycles. The mridangam evolved from ancient Indian percussion instruments and is believed to have been played since the **Vedic period**. Some legendary mridangam players include **Palghat Mani Iyer and Umayalpuram Sivaraman**. It remains a crucial instrument in Carnatic concerts, blending seamlessly with vocal and instrumental performances.

Wind Instruments (Sushir Vadya)

3. Flute (Bansuri)



The **bansuri** is an ancient **bamboo flute**, deeply connected to **Indian classical music and mythology**. It is associated with **Lord Krishna**, who is often depicted playing the flute. The bansuri has **six to eight finger holes** and is played by blowing air into its open end while covering holes to produce notes. The bansuri produces a **soft, melodious sound** and is used in **both Hindustani and folk music**. The instrument can create **expressive, sliding notes (meend)** and is capable of mimicking the human voice. Traditionally made from a single piece of bamboo, modern bansuris come in different sizes for various pitch ranges. **Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia** is one of the greatest bansuri players, known for popularizing it worldwide. The flute's **simple construction yet deep, emotional sound** makes it one of the most beloved instruments in India.

6.Shehnai



The **shehnai** is a **double-reed wind instrument** known for its **piercing, nasal tone**. It is often played at **weddings, religious ceremonies, and temples**. The shehnai has a **wooden body** with a flared metal bell at the end, giving it a distinctive sound. It requires great breath control and finger dexterity to play intricate melodies. The instrument is believed to have evolved from the Persian **nagaswaram** and was traditionally used in **royal courts**. The shehnai was **elevated to a classical instrument by Ustad Bismillah Khan**, who performed it on global stages. The shehnai is associated with **auspicious events**, and its sound is believed to bring good fortune. It is a prominent instrument in **North Indian classical music** and has been adapted into film music as well.

Dholak



The **Dholak** is a **two-headed drum** widely used in **folk music**, **classical compositions**, and **Bollywood songs** across India. It has a **barrel-shaped wooden body**, with both ends covered by **animal skin or synthetic membranes**. One side produces a **higher-pitched tone**, while the other gives a **deeper bass sound**. Unlike the tabla, it does not have tuning paste, so the pitch is adjusted by tightening or loosening the ropes or bolts.

Dholak is commonly used in **weddings**, **religious gatherings (bhajans, kirtans)**, and **folk dances** like **Bhangra**, **Garba**, and **Lavani**. It is played with both hands, with intricate **rhythmic patterns** created using fingers and palms. The instrument is also popular in **Pakistan**, **Nepal**, and **Bangladesh**, playing a key role in traditional music.

Santoor



The **Santoor** is an **ancient Indian stringed instrument** originating from **Kashmir**. It has a **trapezoid-shaped wooden body** with **over 100 metal strings**, stretched across **movable bridges**. The player strikes the strings with **wooden mallets (mezrab)**, producing a **delicate, soothing sound**. Unlike plucked string instruments like the **sitar** or **veena**, the santoor's notes resonate beautifully due to the **hammered technique**.

Historically, the **Santoor** was played in **Sufi music** and **folk traditions of Kashmir**. However, **Pandit Shivkumar Sharma** introduced it to **Indian classical music**, making it a globally recognized instrument. The santoor is now used in **fusion music, contemporary compositions, and Bollywood film scores**.

Harmonium



The **Harmonium** is a **keyboard-based reed instrument** introduced to India by European missionaries in the **19th century**. Over time, Indian musicians adapted it, making it a crucial part of **Indian classical**,

devotional, and folk music. It operates on a **hand-pumped bellows system**, where pressing the keys allows air to pass through reeds, producing sound.

The harmonium is widely used in **bhajans, qawwalis, ghazals, and classical music** as an accompanying instrument for vocalists. It provides a **continuous melodic base** and can sustain notes for a long time. While Western music uses the **piano for accompaniment**, Indian classical music relies heavily on the harmonium for its **rich tonal quality and versatility**.

Sarangi



The **Sarangi** is a **short-necked bowed string instrument**, known for its ability to **closely imitate the human voice**. It is carved from a **single block of wood** and has **three main gut strings** played with a

horsehair bow. Additionally, it has **up to 35 sympathetic strings**, which vibrate and enrich its tonal depth.

Sarangi was once the most popular **accompaniment instrument for Indian classical singers**, especially in **Hindustani music**. It is often associated with **ghazals, thumris, and folk music**. Due to its rich, soulful sound, it can evoke **deep emotions** in listeners. Some of the greatest **Sarangi maestros** include **Ustad Sultan Khan, Ram Narayan, and Sabri Khan**.

Famous Musicians of India 🎵

India has a rich musical heritage, and many legendary musicians have contributed to its evolution. Here are some of the most famous ancient musicians who shaped Indian classical music:

1. Sage Narada (Mythological Era)

Narada is a **divine sage (Rishi) and musician** in Hindu mythology, often depicted carrying a **Veena**. He is considered the **messenger of the gods** and is believed to have brought **music, devotion, and wisdom** to the world. Narada is often associated with the concept of

Nada Brahma (the divine sound) and played a key role in the evolution of **Sama Veda chants** into structured music.

2. Bharata Muni (2nd Century BCE)

Bharata Muni was an ancient Indian sage and the author of the **Natya Shastra**, a Sanskrit treatise on performing arts, including music, dance, and drama. He classified musical notes into **seven Swaras (Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni)** and introduced the concept of **Ragas**. His work laid the foundation for both **Carnatic and Hindustani classical music**.

3. Matanga Muni (5th Century CE)

Matanga was a renowned musicologist and the author of **Brihaddeshi**, a seminal work that introduced the term "**Raga**" for the first time. He explained how different **musical patterns** could evoke various emotions, shaping the evolution of **Indian classical music**.

4. Jayadeva (12th Century CE)

Jayadeva was a poet and composer from Odisha, best known for his masterpiece **Gita Govinda**. His devotional songs dedicated to **Lord Krishna and Radha** were sung in **temples and royal courts**. His

compositions influenced the **Bhakti movement** and contributed to the evolution of **classical and devotional music** in India.

5. Purandara Dasa (1484–1564)

Often called the "**Father of Carnatic Music**," Purandara Dasa was a composer, saint, and music theorist. He developed the **basic lessons (Sarali Varisai, Alankaras) for Carnatic music students** and composed thousands of devotional songs in **Kannada**. His works continue to be the foundation for learning **Carnatic classical music** today.

6. Tansen (1493–1586)

Tansen was a legendary musician in the court of **Mughal Emperor Akbar**. He was one of the **Navaratnas (Nine Gems)** of Akbar's court and a master of **Hindustani classical music**. He composed several **ragas**, including the famous **Miyan ki Malhar** (associated with rain) and **Miyan ki Todi**. His music was believed to have **magical effects**, such as lighting lamps with Raga Deepak.

7. Swami Haridas (1478–1573)

Swami Haridas was a great **saint and musician** from the Bhakti movement and the **guru of Tansen**. He was known for his **Dhrupad**

compositions and was a devotee of **Lord Krishna**. His bhajans and compositions continue to inspire **devotional and classical music** in India.

8. Amir Khusro (1253–1325)

Amir Khusro was a **poet, scholar, and musician** during the **Delhi Sultanate**. He is credited with creating the **Qawwali** tradition and contributing to the development of **Hindustani classical music**. He introduced Persian and Indian musical elements to create unique **ragas and talas**. He is also believed to have invented the **Sitar and Tabla**.

9. Tyagaraja (1767–1847)

Tyagaraja was one of the **Trinity of Carnatic Music**, along with **Muthuswami Dikshitar** and **Shyama Shastri**. He composed over **700 kritis (devotional compositions)** in **Telugu**, many dedicated to **Lord Rama**. His compositions are widely performed in **Carnatic music concerts** today.