



VEDIC SWARANKA: NOTATION OF ANCIENT INDIA

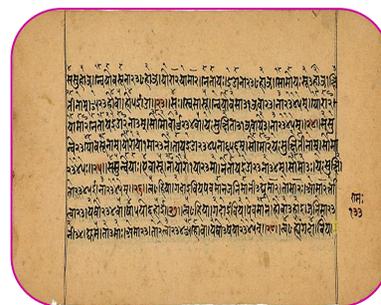
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ABSTRACT

Historical period in India's history has actually started from the Vedic era. Since then, we have got a total picture of India's political, social, economic and cultural fields. Music is a part of Vedic culture. The main song of the vedic era was the 'Samagana'. 'Samagana' was sung according to appropriate rule. The notes of 'Samagana' was indicated through numerical figure(e.g. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7) which was called 'Swaranka'. Names of the vedic tones which was called 'Swaranka' were Prathama, Dvitiya, Tritiya, Chaturtha, Mandra, Atiswariya and Krusta.



KEY WORD: SAMAGANA, SHRUTI, VEDIC TONES, UDATTA, ANUDATTA, SVARITA, SWARANKA.

INTRODUCTION:

Generally, it has been speculated in the minds of music-lovers that there was nothing called 'Notation' in ancient India. In 'Guru-Shishya Parampara' (Teacher-disciple tradition) the songs were based on 'Shruti' (listening) from the lengthy period of time. It is quite true that songs were remembered through listening. So, it was very normal to prevalent in 'Guru-Shishya Parampara' (Teacher-disciple tradition). But which songs were based on religious music, its distortion cannot be expected in any religious community. Therefore, the need to innovate the way to keep them unchanged as much as possible was also regognized in ancient times. "The Encyclopedia Britannica" says that, "It is probable that the earliest attempts at notation were made by Hindus and Chinese from whom the principle was transferred to Greece"(P. 21 Vol. 16).

One thing we must remember is that, in any country and any notation system of the world, there is an effort to keep the various elements of music in appropriate form. These elements are - tone, language, rhythm, tempo and style. The attempts to reveal these musical elements in the earliest vedic notation have been observed. Vedic songs were called 'Samagana'. The language of those songs were 'Dev-Bhasa'(which was pre-sanskrit language).

The hymns of Samaveda were sung in well-defined tunes and according to set rules. Samaveda is divided into two parts - (i) Archika, and (ii) Gana. 'Archika' contains only the texts of the songs (The word archik is derived from the word 'rik' or 'rich', 'rik' means 'Mantra') while the part 'Gana' contains the texts with notation. 'Samagana' was written in a notation of its own which was numerical. Vedic notes were indicated by the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. So, this type of notation system was called 'Swaranka system' in vedic period. Vedic rhythm of metre [kabyo-chhondo] used to write the vedic 'Mantra' or 'Rik'. Some of the vedic rhythm of metre were 'Gayatri', 'Anushtup' etc. But simple rhythm was used to compose vedic 'Samagana'. The style of 'Samagana' was primitive in

nature. Samavedic notation was the earliest one that was ever developed. 'samagana' was sung according to very strict rules.

We notice in vedic period that the gradual evolution of folk music in systematic, formalistic art music. Generally folk music is confined into three to five notes. Though all the seven notes were recognized and isolated in course of time in the vedic period, yet in the whole samaveda, there are few hymns which use six or seven notes. There were three stages in the development of samavadic music. It employed only three notes at the first stage. It employed four to five notes in second stage. In the last stage, it employed six to seven notes. these seven notes are -

- (i) Archika (consisted of one note only)
- (ii) Gathika (consisted of two notes)
- (iii) Samika (consisted of three notes)
- (iv) swarantar (consisted of four notes)
- (v) Oudava (consisted of five notes)
- (vi) Shadava (consisted of six notes)
- (vii) Sampurna (consisted of seven notes)

The vedic music, 'Samagana' was the earliest scientific method of singing in India. It became more systematic when three base tones like 'Udatta', 'Anudatta' and 'Svarita' were the three pitches used in vedic recitative.

- (i) Udatta - 'Udatta' is an acute or sharp pitch.
- (ii) Anudatta - 'Anudatta' is a grave pitch.
- (iii) Svarita - 'Svarita' is a pitch which combined in itself the characteristics of both i.e, it started with 'Udatta' and fell down to 'Anudatta'.

In vedic literature, 'Svarita' was called *pravana* i.e, it gradually descended from 'Udatta' to 'Anudatta'. It made a link between 'Udatta' and 'Anudatta'. These three were not merely stress or accents on words; they were musical pitches used for simple recitative.

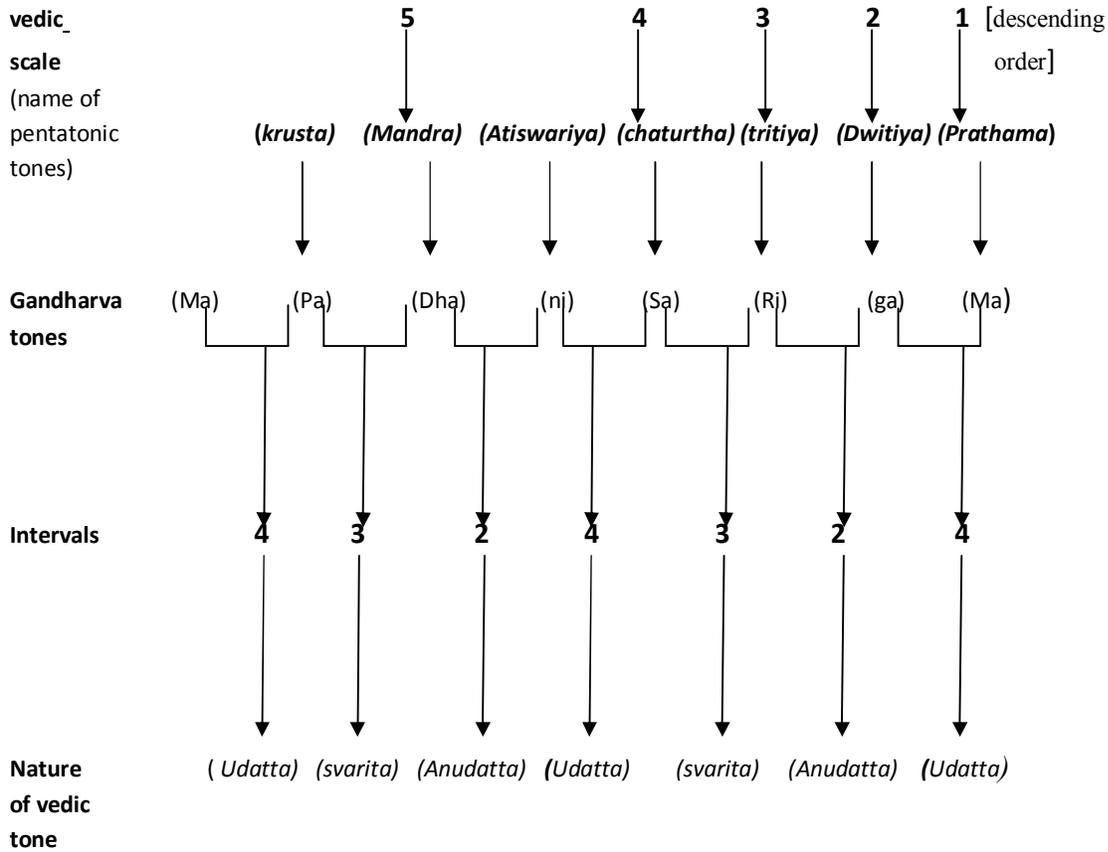
The vedic tones evolved in downward process ('Avarohan-Krama'). It starting from 'Ma' ('Madhyama'). According to the rule set by Narada of siksa:

**"Yah Samaganang Prathamah sah Benormadhyamah Swarah"**

The word 'venu' indicates the formalised 'laukika' or 'desi' type of music.

However, the vedic notes were indicated by the numerical figures ('Swaranka') as follows :-

NUMERICAL FIGURE	VEDIC TONE	LAUKIKA TONE
1.	Prathama	Madhyama
2.	Dwitiya	Gandhara
3.	Tritiya	Rishava
4.	Chaturtha	Sadja
5.	Mandra	Dhaibata
6.	Atiswarya	Nishada
7.	Krushta	Panchama



Those, who are inclined to consider Vedic 'Krusta' corresponds *laukika madhyama*, *prathama gandhara* etc. arranged the note vedic and *laukika* as follows:

#### VEDIC TONES

Prathama  
Dwitiya  
Tritiya  
Chaturtha  
Mandra  
Atiswariya  
Krushta

#### LAUKIKA TONES

ga  
Ri  
Sa  
ni  
Dha  
Pa  
Ma

now, the form of vedic scale is 6 ← 5 ← 4 ← 3 ← 2 ← 1 ← 7.

(Pa) (Dha) (ni) (Sa) (Ri) (ga) (Ma)

According to these scale 'Udatta' = ga and ni, 'Anudatta' = Ri and Dha, and 'Svarita' = Ma, Sa, Pa. And according to these scale the vedic 'Swaranka' (Numerical figure of tones) is as follows:

1 = ga  
2 = Ri  
3 = Sa  
4 = ni  
5 = Dha

6 = Pa  
7 = Ma

example of 'Samagana' (sama song) which was written by swaranka system in bengali script is as follows:-

১- ২ | ৩ ১ ১২      ১৩ ১ ২ | ৩ ১ ২ | ১  
(১) স্বক্ ॥ তত্‌স বি তু ব্‌ বে গ্য ভর্গো দে ব স্য ধীমহি  
  
২ ৩ ১ | ২ ৩ ১ ২  
ধী য়ো য়ো নঃ প্রচোদয়াত্‌ ।

Till now, we have discussed about the numerical form of vedic notes which was called 'Swaranka', used in vedic 'swaralipi paddhati'(Notation system). In addition to the above rules, there were many little little rules about the vedic notation. Therefore, regarding reading the vedic notation there is different opinion of different community.

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