



# Music - A Medium of Communication

*(From The Perspective of Indian Music)*

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**Abstract:** The first thought that comes to our mind, when we hear the term “music” is that; it's an art. But beyond an art form, music is an excellent communication tool. It also plays an important role in communicating human emotions. Music is a medium of verbal and nonverbal communication. This article deals with the importance of music as a medium of communication.

**Index Terms - Music, Communication medium, Indian Music concepts.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Every living being communicates in some way or the other means. Animals communicate in their language of expressions. Humans from the origin itself had used primitive forms of communication methods. As time passed, they also developed the languages for speaking and writing. Along with these developments of communication, humans have been using a very unique method of communication also. And it is Music. The primitive men used tunes or pieces of music to convey meanings, and also used music and musical instruments in various circumstances they faced during their lives. By the effort of numerous experiments by humans for centuries; rudiment/rustic forms of music grew into classical forms in all the countries in the world. In addition to the lyrics or text, the tune or music of a song has a prominent role in exchanging emotions, ideas, etc. Music is the language of emotions.

Let's look at the relationship between 'Sangeetha' (music) and 'Sahitya' (literature or text or prose). At first glance, it may seem that these two have no connection. But music and literature are very much related. As per the theory of Indian music, Sahitya also means 'lyrics or text' of the song. (As mentioned earlier, language and text are tools used in the communication).

We shall start with a Sanskrit sloka, its transliteration goes like this:-

// Samgeethamapi Saahityam  
Saraswathya sthanadwayam/  
/Ekamaapaathamadhuram  
Anyathalochanamritham //

It means that Sangeetha and Sahitya are the two breasts of the Goddess Saraswati, (The Goddess of Wisdom, Knowledge and Art according to Hindu mythology) and one (Sangeetha) is sweet at the very first moment of its hearing and other (Sahitya) is sweet only when we contemplate it. From this sloka itself, we can see the importance given to music by the ancient scholars of India. The sloka says that music and Sahitya are closely related.

## II. SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS OF INDIAN MUSIC

Now, we shall come to some scientific aspects of Indian Classical music. We all know that music is built based on the Sapthaswaras or based on 7 notes Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni. That is, Shadja, Rishabha, Gandhara, Madhyama, Panchama, Dhaivatha and Nishada respectively. [In Western music also the number is 7 (the notes are 7). They are Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Si].

Shadja and panchama have only one variety each. So these are called Achala swaras. (That means Constant notes). For the other swaras Ri, Ga, Ma, Dha and Ni have two varieties each and so they are called Vikritha swaras (Moving notes). These varieties are komal swaras and tivra swaras. So, five swaras of two varieties each =10. Therefore, we get 2+10=12 in total. These are the 12 swarasthanas. These 12 swarasthanas are the basics of Indian music.

The Sruthis (microtones) give rise to Swaras (notes) and a few Swaras together form a Raga. Ragas are the unique melodic factors of Indian music. Sruthi is the smallest audible difference of pitch.

Another peculiar aspect of Indian music; especially of the South Indian music is the extensive use of Gamakas. Gamakas are the oscillations and embellishments of swaras or notes using some adjacent sruthis to enhance the beauty and characteristics of the particular swara of a raga.

In a Stahyi (octave) of Indian music, there are many subtle sruthis which are contributing to the melodic individuality of raga. A scholarly musician can perceive nearly fifty sruthis. But, 22 sruthis with individualities have been identified by the ancient Indian musicologists for practical use. We cannot find all these sruthis in all ragas. The swaras and sruthis included in a tune have their inherent bhava or emotion. The specialities of these 22 sruthis, swaras and gamakas give particular bhava or emotion to each raga and impart very special charming effects to all Ragas. The bhava of a Raga can directly affect the minds of people.

### III. MUSIC AS A COMMUNICATION MEDIUM

Let us examine, how music is becoming a medium of communication.

Communication takes place mainly in two ways; verbal and non-verbal methods. That is, through words and gestures, visuals, etc. By reading newspapers, viewing televisions, listening to radio and other media the same thing is happening. These two types of communication are inherent in music. In addition to these, the mood or emotions of the idea or theme also is communicated through music to the audience.

But music is not used in all situations. The realm of music is different. As everyone knows, it is used on special occasions and circumstances. The other mass media forms are handling a variety of topics or events as the objectives of them are different.

Music communicates more than any text or picture in a print media or visuals in a video media. The completeness of communication through any video mass media can only be attained with the help of music.

There is another sloka:-

// Pasurvethi sisurvethi  
vethi gaana rasam phani: //

The meaning of this Sanskrit sloka is:-

“If it is Pashu (animal) or Shishu (infant) or a Phani (snake) likes the Gana Rasa alike”. Gana Rasa is the sweetness of music.

We can see a strong proof for this when “lullaby” songs are sung by mothers for their children. This practice could have originated since the origin of mankind and from the first-ever mother. No father or mother or grandmother have not consoled and made sleep their children or grandchildren using lullabies. Even if the infants are not able to understand the meaning of the “lullaby” sung by their parents or grandparents, the infants enjoy the ‘bhava’ or emotion conveyed by the “lullaby” song. That is why it is said that music is the sweetest and the simplest form of communication we have. We will explore furthermore in this regard.

I remember my college days; while we were singing together inside our class, the cows who had a habit of grazing freely on our campus entered on the verandah of our class, looked into the classroom and stood still, listening to the music. This incident was repeated on a few occasions during our course. The same thing has been noticed by me several times in many places including at my house. The birds and household animals were going stuck by the tunes coming from the music player or the song we sang.

Again let us see another Sanskrit sloka, transliterated below:-

//Ajnaathavishayaswaado baala:  
Paryankikagatha; /  
Rudran geethaamrutham peethwaa  
Harshotkarsham prapadyathe//

It means that even the child who does not have any knowledge about the world and the meaning of the words of the song stops crying and listens to the song. The child enjoys the beauty or attracted by the charming effects of the tune or music; not the meaning of the song. The child may slowly get into sleep also.

It is this quality of music is used or exploited positively and extensively in all types of advertising, propaganda or in any purpose similar to that or even in political campaigns. By using music, the audiences easily get attracted towards the music and as a result, the ideas or information that are to be transmitted are conveyed simply and effectively to the audience or the public.

Now, we can come to the teachings of Bharata Muni (Sage) (BCE 200-200CE). He is the author of the Sanskrit grandha (text) “Natyasastra”; an ancient great treatise of dramaturgy, dance and musicology.

He states in his Natyasastra that, the human mind is comprised of Sthayibhavas. (Permanent moods). These are Rathi, Hasa, Soka, Krodha, Bhaya, Juguptsa and Vismaya. Sthayibhavas have Upa bhavas (Auxiliary moods) also. These are Sanchari bhavas and Vyabhichari bhavas.

From the Sthayibhavas, arise Rasas (sentiments). We all heard about the Navarasas. They are Sringara (love), Hasya (laughter), Karuna (sadness), Raudra (anger), Vira (courage), Bhayanaka (fear), Bibhatsa (disgust), Adbhutha (wonder) and Santha (calmness). In these, Santha rasa was added later. The Sthayibhava of Santha is called Nirveda.

Again later, Bhakthi rasa (devotion) also was added to earlier nine rasas. Deshabhakthi (Patriotism), Vatsalaya (affection), Preyas (friendship) are considered as additional rasas besides the major rasas.

It is these Rasas, which are conveyed to the minds of audiences along with the music. No art is enjoyable without music. We can see that every performing art is accompanied by music.

Another strong evidence for the importance of music is that, the abundant use of music in the form of background music in cinemas, dramas, videos, TV or radio programmes, etc. in addition to the usual full songs included in these. Without any background music, these art forms are incomplete in portraying emotions. We are not bothered or thinking about the contribution of music. No cinema or drama or video is enjoyable without music and not any one of these will be effective in fulfilling their objectives.

Just imagine a cinema without a music or background score. No doubt, it will be monotonous as well as not evoking emotions, the story intends to produce. We can experiment this fact simply, by a sudden muting of any advertisement, video, story, song, or cinema, we are watching interestingly. We will feel the difference abruptly.

The music used in cinema, drama, or videos or radio programmes, or any other art forms; are derivatives of classical ragas. And any small piece of music also is composed of swaras and sruthis as mentioned earlier. Nowadays western music tunes are also used in our films, videos, advertisements, etc.

In this context, the term “music”, is not necessarily a full song. A piece or pieces of tunes also are enough to produce emotions. Hence, in addition to the dialogues and meaning of words in a story; there is something that enhances the effectiveness of communication. That duty cannot be performed solely by dialogues or words in the script. Here is the role of music arises.

The most important objective of communication is “to touch others mind”. And induce some effect on them. Mere words and their meaning are not capable of producing the complete effect. That is why a primitive man used music in his style. And from the times of sage Bharatha himself, we are taught the importance of music, and we are gifted with Grandhas like Natyasastra.

#### IV. OTHER POWERS OF MUSIC

Music has the power to soothe aggressiveness. Prof. Sambamurthy in his book ‘South Indian Music’, talks about a character in Purana (ancient texts of Hindu mythology of India) named Udayana, had subdued a mad elephant using his Yazh (an ancient musical instrument like Harp).

Each raga has its own peculiarity and bhava. Raga Kamas can portray Karuna rasa (Sadness). Raga Bilahari portrays happiness. The ragas Athana, Darbar, have the ability to create veera rasa (Valour). Ragas like Punnagavarali, Nathanamakriya, Aahiri, Khanda, Mukhari, etc. produce grief.

Everyone now knows about Ragachikitsa or Music therapy. It is not a modern concept. There are ancient books on Music therapy in the Saraswathi Mahal Library, Tanjore, Tamilnadu, India. This is mentioned in the book ‘Ragachikitsamrutham’ by Dr Suvarna Nalappat.

Some ragas have the powers to cure diseases. It is this quality of music is utilized in Ragachikitsa or Music Therapy. For example, Dwijavanthi raga has the power to alleviate the effects of pakshaghatha or paralysis or stroke. Likewise, Todi raga can cure high blood pressure, tension, anxiety, stress, etc. This raga bears komala swaras in its scale or in Arohana and Avarohana. As mentioned earlier in this article, the komala swaras are responsible for giving soothing effects. On the contrary, the Raga Kalyani has tivra swaras in its scale and thereby it can induce the rasas like utsaha, veera, (enthusiasm, courage, etc.) and thus helps in curing distress, low blood pressure, etc.

That is, Komal swaras have a pathos, bhakthi (devotion) effects, etc. And tivra swaras can produce happiness, courage, enthusiasm, etc. Likewise, swaras in the higher tessitura of a Raga (in arohana and avarohana) produce bhavas like pleasant, valour, etc. In the same way swaras in the lower tessitura of a raga evoke pathos.

In a tune or song, the Swara sancharas in speed tempo create a happy or enthusiastic mood. The same thing in a slow tempo has an effect of sadness.

When a musician sings or plays music, the meaning of the lyrics, bhavas or emotions are conveyed to the audiences. And when he performs deeply involved or immersed in music, the emotions or the bhava of the song is communicated effectively and touch the minds of listeners. And they enjoy the music with the same emotions that are transmitted by the singer or the performer. Thus the performer and the audiences reach the same emotional level. Or in other words, they attain “oneness” emotionally.

Here, the performer is the sender of the message, the music is the medium and the audience is the receiver. The same thing is described in modern communication theories as successful communication.

The quality (timbre) of the voice of a singer, his personality, appearance, dignity in dressing, moderate gestures also are the factors affecting successful communication. For music, it is not necessary to have words for communicating emotions. That is why we are able to enjoy and feel the Rasas when an instrumentalist plays music.

The great Greek philosopher Aristotle (BC 384-322) has said that “Music directly imitates the passions or states of the soul...when one listens to music, that imitates a certain passion, he becomes imbued with the same passion; and if over a long time he habitually listens to music that rouses ignoble passions, his whole character will be shaped to an ignoble form.”

## V. CONCLUSION

It is not just the letters, pictures, visuals, gestures, etc. that make communication possible. Music also plays a great role in communication. Music is not only an art but one of the most effective media of communication also. It is the only communication medium with the potential of influencing their audiences easily and faster than any other medium of communication. No other media can transmit human emotions or moods to others, just like music does. Most of us do not think about the greatness of music. We do not think much about the real significance, role and influence of music in our life. Yet we use it, as part of our daily life. That is the magic of music. Music is a boon for us, and the music will go on with the present status until mankind exists on this planet.

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