

Musical Instruments in Hindu Traditional Life

Narayanan Mallikadevi¹

The artistic aspects of Hinduism are not only present in religious rituals, but also visible in customs and traditions. Music, dance, drama and visual arts occupy a central place in Hinduism which embraces the omnipresence of God in the Universe. Those are aspects of Hindu traditional life.

Every human being relates to music as music describes the expression of heart. Music in Hinduism has its origins in divine tradition. According to Hindu mythology, the first ever sound to have been heard in the universe is the *Naadabrahma* or *Om* mantra. This sound pervades the entire Universe. Since it is a manifestation of the divine power (Brahma), it is the purest sound to be heard.

Hindus are even said to have achieved *Moksha* through devoting music to God. For example, in Rig Veda Gargi, the wife of Yajnavalkya, through her excellence in Veena playing, caused Sage Yajnavalkya to write the famous verse:

Veena Vadhana Tathvangna

Sruthi Jathi Visharada

Talanjaa prayasena

Mokshamargam niyachathi

(Yajnavalkya in his 'Smriti')

Meaning: The one who is well versed in Veena, one who has the knowledge of *Srutis* and one who is adept in *Tala* – all of them attain *Moksham* or salvation without effort.

Music is an integral part of Hindu culture. The rich history of music in Hinduism unveils the fact that the divine sage *Narada* introduced the art of music to the earth from heaven. From very early days, music was considered a means of moral and spiritual redemption rather than mere entertainment. Indeed, the process of learning to play music closely resembles traditional spiritual life.

The oldest musical texts are the Sama Veda, consisting of melodious for recitation of hymns during ritual sacrifice.

Musical instruments in Hinduism too boast of great antiquity and can also be said to have a divine origin. Various Hindu deities have been associated with specific instruments. The Goddess Saraswati, depicted with Veena in hand. Lord Brahma, creator of the Universe, portrayed as playing

¹ Lecturer, Department of Sinhala and Modern Languages, Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka.