



## Veena-The Divine Instrument

Veena is one of the three principal musical instruments mentioned in the vedic literature, the other two being the Venu (flute) and Mrindanga. Veena is said to be in existence from the time of Rig Veda and can be called as the queen of all instruments without a second thought. It is referred to as a celestial instrument because there are several sculptures and pictures of Saraswathi, Narada, Hanuman and Dakshinamoorthy (veenaadhaara Dakshinamoorthy) playing the instrument. Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning is referred to as “**Veena Pusthaka Dharini**” in several hymns and songs by the Trinity and other great composers. **HER picture is incomplete without the Veena and the Veda in HER hands.** These three instruments – the flute / Venu is inseparably connected with Lord Krishna and the Mridangam is associated with Nandhi and Veena in the hands of Saraswathi.

The Vedic sage Yajnavalkya speaks of the greatness of the Veena in the following verse: “One who is skilled in Veena play, one who is an expert in the varieties of sruthis (quarter tones) and one who is proficient in tala attain salvation without effort.”

Sankara Bhagavadpada describes Goddess Meenakshi as “Veena Venu Mridanga Vaadyarasikaam” in Meenakshi Pancharatnam. Kalidasa – the eminent poet describes Divine Mother as the one who plays Veena “Maanikya veenaam Upalalayantim” (Syamala Dandakam), “Maasil veenaiyum maalai madhiyamum” in Tevaram by Appar. In Lalitha Sahasranamam there is a sloka as

निजसल्लाप माधुर्यं विनिर्भर्त्सितं कच्छपी

nijasallapa madhurya vinirbhar-tsita kacchapi

this means “the speech of Goddess is more melodious than the Veena of Sarasvati known as Kachhapi” (does this also mean that women should speak more melodiously and softly like the nada that comes from a Veena??)



We can recall that the great vageyakaras like Tyagaraja, Dikshithar, Syama Sastri, Purandaradasar, Veena Kuppayyer etc were all Vainika – Gayakas.

**Muthuswamy Dikshithar** proudly stamps his signature as “**Vainika Gayaka Guruguha**” in the Bhairavi song Balagopala. In his immortal composition “Meenakshi Me Mudam” in raga **Purvikalyani / Gamakakriya**, Dikshithar addresses Raja Matangi- the Divine Mother as “**Veena Gaana Dasagamakakriye**”. Incidentally, Muthuswami Dikshithar attained mukthi while playing this song in Veena amidst his disciples. It can be seen that 99% of his krithis have a Madhyamakala Sahityam that comes immediately after Anupallavi and also after Charanam. This Madhyamakala Sahityam if closely observed resembles Tanam played in Veena. This is a uniqueness featuring in all Dikshithar compositions mainly because he was a Vainika first and then a Gayaka. **The epitome of Veena playing is the Tanam.** This is the only instrument where music can be played simultaneously in two octaves.

Playing Veena is yoga, leading to salvation as Saint Tyagaraja sings in his krithi “Mokshamugalada..”. Saint Tyagaraja is concerned only with Salvation obtained through Nada Yoga, though there are several other alternatives too to obtain Salvation like Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakthi Yoga and Raja Yoga as mentioned in Bhagavad Gita.

**Saint Tyagaraja** brings out with all lyrical beauty and brilliance about the importance of this divine instrument in his song Mokshamu Galada!

**“vINA vAdana loludau Sivamano  
vidha merugaru, thyAgarAja vinutha”**

**(Meaning)** Is salvation obtainable to those who are not able to perceive the mind of Shiva who derives indescribable pleasure from listening to the divine music of Vina!



It may further be noted that the first part of the charanam of this song describes about vocal music and the second part talks of Veena music. It perhaps testifies the intimate association of veena music with vocal music. At this juncture, it may well be noted that the renowned musicologist, Prof. Sambamoorthy suggested that **singing along with veena improves the quality of the voice.**

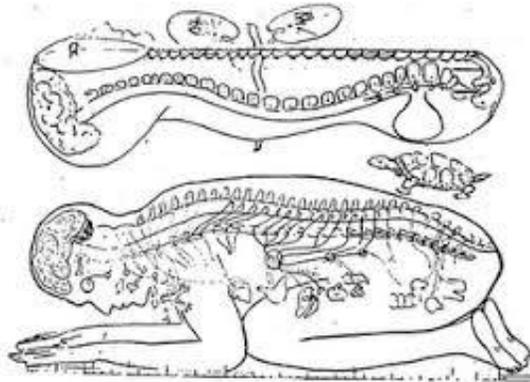
### Playing Veena is Nada Yoga

Playing Veena is the easiest **Yoga to attain Salvation. A vainika practices Kumbhakam, yogic retention of breath; ie; neither inhaling nor exhaling breath sitting in a cross legged posture.** The music from the divine instrument touches the chords of the heart. The Nada from this divine instrument can be best described as graceful, elegant, soul-elevating, soul-touching and life transforming. **Nada Yoga through this divine instrument will not only bestow Mukthi (Salvation) but also Bhukthi (Material Enjoyment).**

Most of the vainikas whom I have met show a divine calmness in the way they present themselves and their interaction with others. May be they have had God Realisation by playing Veena or by singing soul-elevating krithis. It can be seen that **there is an underlying principle of philosophy, bhakthi and moral guidelines in all the krithis that we listen, learn, sing or play in Veena.**

### Veena and Human Body

Veena is of two kinds – Deiveeka Veena and Maanushi Veena (Man made Veena). **The human body created by God is the 'deiveeka veena'. The veena made out of wood by human beings is called as the 'maanushi veena'.** Both these Veena are made and intended to produce the divine Nada or Music.





Veena is modeled on human body. There are many resemblances between the Deiva Veena) and Maanushi Veena. Just mentioning a few similarities here..

Just like a human body has a head, Veena too has a head which is named as Kudam. Maanushi Veena has 24 frets, 4 strings on the frets and 3 on the side (they are the tala strings symbolising **IchhaSakthi, JnanaSakthi and KriyaSakthi**). **Ichhasakthi is the burning desire to achieve a goal. With this fire of desire, we start searching for the right knowledge or JnanaSakthi to achieve the goal and once knowledge (Jnana) is gained, we need to put it in action – KriyaSakthi to realise the goal.**

This is what it is mentioned in Lalitha Sahasranamam as

इच्छाशक्ति ज्ञानशक्ति क्रियाशक्ति स्वरूपिणी।

Ichhaasakthi Jnaanasakthi Kriyaasakthi Swaroopini

The four strings (melody strings on the frets) represent the Chatur Veda- Rig, Yajur, Sama and Adharva. **The four strings also symbolise the chatur vidha purushartha-Dharma /Righteousness, Artha/Wealth, Kama/Desire and Moksha/Salvation. Thus playing Veena bestows the four dimensional fruits of life according to our karmic merits.**

The 24 frets represent 12 swarasthanas in two octaves (24). Just like the 24 frets of the Veena, human back bone has 24 divisions. According to the human anatomy, the back bone has 7 cervicles (7 strings), 12 thorasic (representing the 12 swara sthanas) and 5 lumbar vertebrae (representing the 5 notes R, G, M, D,N – S and P are not included as they are prakrithi swaras or natural notes). The 24 frets get their importance by the nada produced from them.

The 7 strings are also compared to the Saptha Dhatus in a human body which are skin, bone, brain, flesh, blood, semen and shonitha of the female. Without these Saptha Dhathus human body is incomplete. We cannot imagine a Veena without these 7 strings. The nadis Ida and Pingla in the human body is also said to be representing the strings. The thantris or strings in Mannushi Veena is also said to represent human fingers (these strings are plucked with fingers to emanate divine nada from the instrument).

Like the human vertebrae, the frets in the veena beginning from the note Rishabham in the ascending order become narrower as it progresses to Thara sthayi. The tone of the veena also becomes lighter as it reaches the narrow frets representing the Thara Sthayi. Human body also





A perfect synchronisation of both plucking and playing with the right and left hand respectively produces the most divine nada. This can be further explained as **the right hand pluck is mechanical (right hand symbolising the mind is always wandering endlessly and mechanically) whereas the left hand (that symbolises the Buddhi/Wisdom) meettu or play on the correct notes according to the raga brings in melody.** This can further be simplified as the Mind should be kept in perfect control by the Intellect or the Buddhi to keep track of the negative and positive thoughts.

The Mandhra Sthayi Swara starts from the seat point of the human back bone (Muladhara Chakra) and as it proceeds towards the Brahma Randhram situated in the Sahasraram, the pitch or sruthi increases. It is here, where the life of music is situated. The nada born out of the union of prana (life) and agni (fire) starts from the Muladhara at low sruthi and reaches the Sahasrakalam crossing the Swadhishtana, Manipura, Anahata, Vishuddhi and Ajna- the Shad chakras. In this course the sruthi (pitch) increases. This shows the resemblance between the Deiveeka Veena and Maanushi Veena. So it is definite that to attain Moksha, nada yoga is a correct path, and for practicing nada yoga Veena is the most appropriate instrument. **The music that is produced while playing this divine instrument invokes the untapped and hidden spiritual energy in the subtle body enabling the vainika to experience eternal joy and bliss.**

Thus Veena demonstrates the potential for the negative and positive purposes of knowledge. The Veena nada symbolises the collective sound of all our thoughts and actions. It makes the withdrawal of the senses and bestows the focus needed to attain divine knowledge. When Veena Nada is accompanied along with Vocal music, singing becomes more precise and melodious resembling the nada that emanates from the Veena.

The human body which resembles a Veena emanates Nada through the Nabhi, Hridayam, Khandam, Rasanaa and Naasagram (remembering the song by Saint Tyagaraja). This instrument stimulates the heart and the nada produced from Veena penetrates through the skin giving a blissful feeling to the mind, body and soul! According to Sadguru Sri Shivananda Murthy the veena nada becomes a part of our body if played for 120 hours. It means that the Naadopaasana done internally (inside the mind or body) and that which is done externally by playing the instrument becomes one, and upasana shakti is generated.



### Yali Mukham and the legend

Earlier it was the order of the day for the sages and sanyasins to perform Yagas and Yagnas. These sages were always troubled by a fire-spitting dragon that caused them untold miseries. To get rid of this dragon, the rishis performed austere penance to please Lord Brahma – the Creator. Brahma appeared and promised help to the rishis. But it was an impossible mission entrusted to HIM!! Brahma went to Vaikuntam and Kailasam seeking their help to tame the beast. But the Trinity couldn't bring the dragon under control and they approached Goddess Saraswathi and requested if SHE could tame the dragon with her music. Saraswathi agreed and hid herself in the forest and played on the Veena. The dragon that fell under the spell of divine melodious music, stopped its destruction and went in search of the source of divine nada. Soon it renounced all the destructive chaos and havoc it was causing and developed yearning for the divine music that was flowing from Veena. There was absolute calmness and it prayed to God to let him know who was producing the music. He was guided to Goddess Saraswathi who was playing the Veena. The delighted dragon lost all monstrosities and pleaded for salvation and a permanent place near the music. Satisfied by the earnestness of the seeker, Saraswathi agreed to the request of the dragon and placed him on HER Veena. Thus Yali became an integral part of Veena.

**The Symbolic meaning of Yali is the restless character of human mind which is always turbulent and never calm. But this mind can be put under perfect control through Nada Yoga.** The Human Mind has tremendous potential and immense creative power. We need to practice creative visualization that uses the power of the mind and creativity is the crux and essence of the Indian Carnatic Music. We call it Manodharma Sangeetham. **When the mind is fully engaged in creative music enriched with spiritual content, each and every single cell and fibre in the human system attains divine bliss!**

### Therapeutical Effects of Veena

In South India, there is a tradition, that pregnant women who listen to the sweet music of Veena are assured of safe delivery. It is said that the first sense that develops in a child in the womb is the "hearing sense" and the harmonic music emanating from the strings of Veena – the divine instrument penetrates the womb and makes the child feel the divine soothing effect. Music from strings has the capacity to penetrate the skin. Music on Veena is said to be very effective since the structure of Veena is very much identical to the structure of a human body. Research says that **Raga Yamunakalyani** is considered to have a positive effect on the baby in



the mother's womb as it stimulates all the energy centers of the human body resulting in proper growth of the child in the womb. When the music is heard in the form of Veena Nada, the result is ten-fold. The curative power of music gets activated according to the raga chosen and has a positive impact on hormonal and glandular functions which produce secretions that keep the body balanced and thus heals. According to an ancient Indian text, Swara Sastra, the seventy-two melakarta ragas (parent ragas) control the 72 important nerves in the body. It is believed that if one sings or plays veena with due devotion, adhering to the raga lakshana (norms) and sruthi suddhi, (pitch purity) the raga could affect the particular nerve in the body in a favorable manner. **The vibration of the notes activate a chakra and through the nadis emanating from the chakras, the organ at the side of the disease begins the healing process.**

Any person who has some inclination towards singing should learn Carnatic Music. It has to be so because this form of art has great disciplinary value and the power to vaporise passions and attune the mind. It is only through ceaseless practice/sadhana that a Vainika acquires mastery over this musical instrument. **This practice enables him to acquire a clear intellect, a steady mind, and control over the senses, a sweet voice and absolute freedom from fear of any kind.**

Looking into the history, it can be observed that all ancient carnatic musicians were essentially bhaktas, yogis, and jnanis – in short **they were of saintly character only because of spiritual quality of the art they practiced.** They were all free from ego and jealousy with a mindset that is poised in the pairs of opposites like happiness – sorrow and pleasure-pain. They were ever kind and merciful and always at peace. These are some of the good qualities that one can develop by learning this Ancient Form of Art named as Karnataka Sangeetham if they truly understand the essence, meaning and the message each krithi teaches us.

**“Saa Me Vasatu Jivhagre Veena Pusthaka Dharini”**

**-May Goddess Saraswathi, holding the Veena and the Vedas, always reside in my tongue.**