



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Fakirullah's Perspective on Rare Medieval String Instruments

DR,LIKESHWAR KUMAR VERMA

Assistant Professor

Indira Kala Sangit Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh

Abstract

The study examines Fakirullah's perspective on rare string instruments in medieval Indian music, highlighting their structural features, usage, and historical significance. Drawing upon his descriptions alongside contemporaneous sources such as the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the paper analyzes instruments including the Yantra, Been, Kinnar Been, Surbeen, Rabab, Sarangi, Swarmandal, and Pinaki. Fakirullah adopts a descriptive and practice-oriented approach, documenting variations in construction, string configuration, and performance techniques. His account reflects the evolutionary trajectory of instruments, notably the transformation of the Vina into the Been, Surbeen into the Tanpura, and Ravanahatta into the Sarangi. The study further identifies cross-cultural influences arising from interactions between Indian, Persian, and Arabic musical traditions during the medieval period. By situating these instruments within a broader historical and musicological context, the paper underscores Fakirullah's contribution to the documentation and preservation of rare string instruments in Indian music history.

Keywords

Fakirullah; Medieval Indian Music; String Instruments; Been; Rabab; Sarangi; Swarmandal; Ain-i-Akbari; Musicology; Instrument Evolution

The place and significance of musical instruments in Indian society can be traced back to the Vedic period. During that time, the tradition of *Sāmagāna* was performed in sacrificial rituals, accompanied by instruments such as the *vīṇā*, *veṇu*, and *mṛdaṅga*. Similarly, various types of instruments were employed in secular music as well. From the Vedic age through the epic period, Purāṇic era, medieval period, and into modern times, different types of instruments and their uses have been documented in contemporary treatises. In the *Sangītaratnākara*, the chapter on instruments provides a detailed classification of *tata* (string), *sushira* (wind), *avanaddha* (percussion), and *ghana* (solid) instruments, along with their structural and functional characteristics.

In the medieval musical tradition, instrumental music held a special place, as it most effectively and vividly expressed the fundamental elements of music. Sound production requires vibration, and rhythm (*laya*) is an essential component of such vibration. Without rhythm, music cannot be conceived. Therefore, instrumental music is regarded as a powerful and complete representative form of musical expression. Ācārya Śārṅgadeva, in the *Sangītaratnākara*, defines music as: "*Gītam, vādyam tathā nṛttam, trayam saṅgītam ucyate*"—that is, music comprises song, instrumental music, and dance. These three components are considered equally significant, and their structural and expressive forms are determined by foundational elements such as form and rhythmic divisions.

Within this context, Fakirullah's perspective on rare medieval string instruments becomes highly significant. He presents a distinctive account of the structure, usage, and characteristics of instruments prevalent during his time, particularly string instruments.

1. Yantra

The term *Yantra* generally denotes any musical instrument. According to Fakirullah, it is a wooden instrument, approximately one *gaz* in length and hollow inside, with gourds attached at both ends. It has a fingerboard fitted with sixteen frets and five metal strings stretched across it. Medieval devotional literature, including the works of poets like Surdas and Paramanand Das, also mentions this instrument. Historical references suggest that *Yantra* evolved from the earlier *Tritantrika*, which originally had three strings but later incorporated five. Its usage as a distinct instrument appears to have become prominent around the 14th century.

2. Been (Vina)

Fakirullah describes the *Been* as similar to the *Yantra*, but with three strings. In ancient times, the term *Vīṇā* served as a general designation for string instruments, though specific types had distinct names. In the medieval period, forms such as the *Rudra Vina* and *Saraswati Vina* were prevalent. The *Been* appears to be a linguistic derivative of *Vīṇā*, and its usage continued in North Indian musical traditions, especially within the Seniya lineage.

3. Kinnar Been

The *Kinnar Been* is described as having a longer fingerboard, three gourds, and two strings. It likely corresponds to the *Kinnari Vina*, traditionally believed to have been created by celestial beings known as *Kinnaras*. Classical texts describe two types—*laghu* (small) and *br̥hatī* (large). Sculptural and textual evidence supports its historical presence and structural features.

4. Surbeen

The *Surbeen* resembles the *Vina* but lacks frets. It is mentioned in devotional compositions and is often identified with the *tanpura* or *tambura*. It functioned primarily as a drone instrument, supporting vocal music. Historical evidence suggests that this instrument gained prominence around the 16th century.

5. Amriti

The *Amriti* has a shorter neck than the *Surbeen*, a small gourd at the upper end, and a single string capable of producing all scales. Due to the absence of detailed descriptions of its playing technique, it is difficult to determine whether it resembled a plucked *ektara* or a bowed instrument like the *Ravanahatta*. It remains an obscure but notable string instrument of the period.

6. Rabab

Fakirullah notes that the *Rabab* typically has six gut strings, though some variants include twelve or eighteen strings, with additional metal strings. These variations may have been introduced for tonal richness and adaptability to different climatic conditions. The *Rabab* was widely used across regions such as Sindh, Afghanistan, and Arabia, and could be played either with a bow or by plucking.

7. Swarmandal

The *Swarmandal* is described as similar to the Persian *Qanun*, with approximately twenty-five strings. Earlier versions reportedly had twenty-one strings. It is a plucked instrument, primarily used for melodic and harmonic support. Over time, metal strings became standard, replacing earlier gut strings.

8. Sarangi

According to Fakirullah, the *Sarangi* is smaller than the *Rabab* and is played with a bow, similar to the *Ghichak*. Its origins are often linked to the *Ravanahatta*. The instrument gained prominence in later medieval courts and became an essential accompaniment in vocal music traditions.

9. Pinaki

The *Pinaki* is a bow-shaped wooden instrument with gut strings and resonating cups or gourds at both ends. It is played with a bow, with one gourd supported by the left hand. Its name is associated with *Pinaka*, the bow of Lord Shiva. Historical texts consistently describe its distinctive bow-like structure.

10. Dheuti

This instrument consists of a single gourd and two strings. It is possibly related to the *Adhati* mentioned in historical sources, though its exact connection to earlier Vedic instruments like *Aghati* remains uncertain.

11. Kingira

The *Kingira* resembles the *Vina*, with two strings and smaller gourds. Some versions include additional metal strings and a leather covering, enabling richer tonal production. It is also referred to as the *Tazi Tambur* in Arabic traditions, indicating cross-cultural influences.

Conclusion

The above discussion clearly demonstrates that medieval Indian musical tradition possessed a rich and diverse array of string instruments. Fakirullah's work provides a systematic and authentic account of these instruments, detailing their structure, string configuration, and musical application. His approach is largely descriptive and practical, offering valuable insights into the instruments in use during his time.

His descriptions also reveal the evolutionary nature of these instruments—for instance, the transformation of the *Vina* into the *Been*, the *Surbeen* into the *Tanpura*, and the *Ravanahatta* into the *Sarangi*. Furthermore, by drawing comparisons with contemporary works such as the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Fakirullah strengthens the historical reliability of his observations.

It is also evident that Indian, Persian, and Arabic musical traditions interacted significantly during the medieval period, leading to variations in the structure and nomenclature of instruments. Ultimately, Fakirullah's contribution is invaluable for the preservation, identification, and historical study of rare medieval string instruments. His work serves not only as a resource for musicologists but also as an essential foundation for understanding the evolutionary trajectory of Indian music.

References

- Fakirullah. *Rāgdarpaṇa*. (17th century).
- Abu'l Fazl. *Ain-i-Akbari*. Translated by H. Blochmann. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1873.
- Śārṅgadeva. *Sangītaratnākara*. Various editions.
- Ahobala. *Sangīta Pārijāta*. 17th century.
- Mishra, Lalmani. *Bharatiya Sangeet Vadya*. New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith.
- Mahadik, Prakash. *Bharatiya Sangeet ke Tantri Vadya*.
- Deva, B. C. *Musical Instruments of India: Their History and Development*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978.