

Music in India

Introduction

India has one of the most varied music histories of all countries. The diversity in India means that even music styles vary considerably from one place to another, and this is why India is home to a mix of many different genres.

Indian music often has a religious touch attached to it, since that is how music in India began. The variety in Indian music is not only limited to the genre of the music, but also the musical composition and lyrical style of the song. Even if the instruments used in Indian classical music are the same, two different songs often evoke very different emotions. Ancient treatises also describe the connection of the origin of the *swaras*, or notes, to the sounds of animals and birds and man's effort to simulate these sounds through a keen sense of observation and perception.

Indian music has undergone many changes over the years, both intrinsic and extrinsic. It has been affected by Persian styles, which arrived with the advent of Islamic rulers. The diversity of Indian cultures helped in inclusion of different music styles into one, which is why both *ghazals* and Indian classical songs are now a trademark of Indian music.

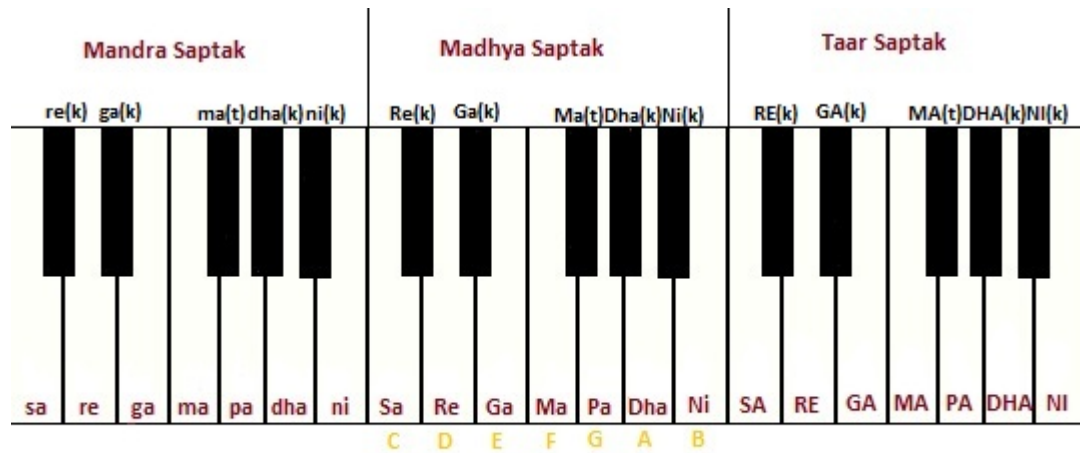
Hindustani Music

North Indian musical traditions are grouped as Hindustani music. Barring a few differences, all music styles are very similar in northern India, as compared to South India. Both systems are fundamentally similar but differ in nomenclature and performance practice.

In Indian tradition, music is thought to be a combination of three art forms: in Hindi, these are described as *gayan* (vocal music), *vadan* (instrumental music) and *nartan* (dance). The present system of Indian music is based upon two important pillars: *raga* and *tala*. *Raga* and *tala* are two unique features of Indian classical music. *Raga* is the melodic form of the music, while *tala* is the rhythm of the music.

Raga may be roughly equated with the Western term mode or scale. There is a system of seven notes which are arranged in a means not very different from Western scales, which is

why there is a similarity in composition of many western and Indian pieces of music. It also explains how two instruments, such as the guitar and the sitar, which were developed independently in different parts of the world, work in such a similar way. However, a closer look reveals a whole host of differences.



The "Saat Sur" (saptaswaram or seven notes) form the backbone of Indian music, and are very similar to their western counterparts.

A *Raga* in its broadest sense could be defined as a mode having rigid form with infinite possibilities for improvisation. *Ragas* have been ascribed to deities, colours and moods.

Hindustani music is based on the interplay of the instruments and the vocals. It is usually dedicated to a deity, but there are examples of songs on less "divine" topics as well. It is usually not fast paced, and instils a sense of peace in listeners.

Carnatic Music

The music practised in South Indian states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh/ Telangana and Kerala is known as Carnatic music. In a musical treatise titled *Sangitsudhakara*, we find a first mention of dichotomy of Hindustani and Carnatic music styles.

There are many composers in Carnatic music. Purandara Dasa (1480–1564) is referred to as the *Pitamaha* (respected father/ grandfather) of Carnatic music as he formulated the basic lessons in teaching Carnatic music, and in honour of his significant contribution to Carnatic music. He structured graded exercises known as *Swaravalis* and *Alankaras*, and at the same time, introduced the *Raga Mayamalavagowla* as the first scale to be learnt by beginners. He also composed *Gitas* (simple songs) for novice students.

A major concept that distinguishes it from Hindustani classical music is that of *Dandi* (pillar). *Chaturdandi* (four pillars) include *alapa*, *thaya*, *gita* and *prabandha*. *Alapa* is extempore creation of a melodic personality in terms of tonal situations which are comprehended in the scale and ten vital characteristics of a *raga*.

Thaya is the second pillar and has no parallel in Hindustani music. It connotes segments or organ of a raga performed in rhythmic patterns on the *veena* or before rendering the *pallavi* composition. *Gita* generally means anything that is sung. *Prabandha*, the fourth *dandi*, is the musical composition.

Carnatic music underwent a sort of a renaissance in the 18th century, with the advent of the famously known “Holy Trinity” of Carnatic Music. The trio of Thyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri revolutionised the musical styles of Southern India, reinventing many existing practices in Carnatic Music.

Shyama Shastri was the eldest of them all, and was known for his lyrical genius and his vocal range. An example of having quality over quantity, Shyama Shastri produced musical works slower than other contemporary artists, but each work he composed was pure magic. His claim to fame was his ability to innovate existing *Ragas* in different ways, each iteration different from the other.

Thyagaraja's work was primarily inspired by his religious nature and his selfless devotion to the almighty. His devotion and utmost faith in God is said to have saved him many times, and he was one who celebrated each deity of every culture he came to know of, rather than being monotheistic. Unfortunately, a large part of his compositions have been lost over time.

Muthuswami Dikshitar, unlike the other two legends, also composed in Sanskrit, had a deep knowledge of Hindu scriptures, and had visited many cities throughout North India, including the holy city of Banaras. Extensive touring and exposure meant that he was an expert in multiple music styles, and also tried to bring in variation in Carnatic music by incorporating elements of Hindustani as well as Western Music.



Tyagaraja



Muthuswami Dikshitar



Syama Sastri

With their own individual innovations, this trio heralded the Golden Age of Carnatic Music.

Folk music

Folk music is very raw, as opposed to Hindustani and Carnatic styles of singing. There are not always a well-defined set of rules to follow in folk music, which is why many folk songs have many different variations, each having different tempo, music and feel. Singing castes like Dholi, Managaniyars, etc. in Rajasthan and other places have kept alive the culture of folk music. In different regions of India, there are different traditions of folk music, be it the desert of Rajasthan, the fields of Punjab or the forests of Chhattisgarh.

Most folk music is about tales that have been narrated throughout the years in a particular community or tribe. Folk songs usually just depict the lives of a simple person of the tribe. They span a wide range of spectrum in terms of musical intensity, tempo and singing style, as the music varies from place to place. Rabindra Sangeet, Lavani and Bihu are some of the most well-known folk music styles in India.

Rabindra Sangeet, named after Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, uses a rich array of *raga* and *raginis*, most notably *behag*, *bhairavi*, *pilu*, *kedara*, *kafi*, etc. His songs have been classified as devotional, patriotic, romantic, etc. This tradition still thrives, and is popular. Rabindra Sangeet is usually considered to be a part of Bengali culture, and is often also mistakenly called Bengali classical music.

Lavani is a style of music popular in Maharashtra and in cities with a large Marathi population. Deriving from the Marathi word "*Lavanya*", meaning beauty, Lavani contains high-energy music, and is accompanied by a dance performance, called Tamasha. Songs usually are from female perspectives, and thus Lavani singers and dancers are primarily women. Lavani is a popular choice of music in the Marathi film industry as well.



Lavani has music which gets the audience on their feet, and the performers barely get time to rest in the high tempo dance that goes with the music.

Rajasthan is home to a wide variety of folk music, and the folk music of the state is almost an extension of its identity. A wide variety of musical castes gives Rajasthani folk music a unique diversity. Most of the lyrics of Rajasthani music are dedicated to their homeland, and in the praises of it. Rajasthani folk music uses a wide range of musical instruments, and has been a favourite music style of many Bollywood music artists throughout the years.



Padharo Mhaare Des – Music of Rajasthan is a welcome song to the land of diversity.

Sufi music



In recent years Sufi music has become popular

Although music does not find an important place in Islam, Sufi mystics have used music for their prayers. Their *Qawwalis* have been a form of worship, a call for the union of the beloved (God). At *dargahs*, like that of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer and Nizamuddin Auliya at Delhi, *Qawwali* has been an integral part of religious activities.

Sufi music reached new heights of popularity due singers like to Nusrat Fateh ali Khan, Abida Parveen, Runa Laila, etc. Similarly *Ghazals* became a mass phenomenon, thanks to Ghulam Ali, Jagjit Singh and other singers like Mehdi Hasan.

Sufi music is a classic example of intermixing of different cultures to create something new, and is basically the result of Islam adopting Hindustani music. Sufi music usually is sung and written in Urdu, which itself is a language born out of the mix of Hindi and Persian. Sufi music is usually very fast paced, and the lyrics are mostly dedicated to the almighty.

Gharanas

A *Gharana* is a unique concept, known only in the Indian musical panorama. Different patrons of music and styles gave rise to different schools of music, known as *gharanas*. Even today musicians proudly adhere to these camps or *gharanas*. For example, the *Kirana Gharana* has given us maestros like Bharat Ratna Pt. Bhimsen Joshi, Hirabai Badodekar and Dr. Prabha Atre to name a few. Some of the prominent *Khayal gharanas* are Agra, Jaipur, Patiala, Kirana and Gwalior.

Gharanas are usually started by a prominent musical personality, who has a different style of music from other existing *gharanas*. Each *gharana* is identified with a particular music style, and they are the places where the purest classical music is found. *Gharanas* usually focus on a mixture of different music types rather than a single one. These *gharanas* have been working under *guru-shishya parampara* (master-disciple tradition), and great importance is given to devotion towards the *guru*.

Close association of *guru* and *shishya* is indeed a very effective and time tested way for imparting music education. However, the number of disciples a *guru* can undertake makes music education restricted to a privileged few. Thus, it is a notable achievement for a singer in India to be associated with a *gharana*, as it keeps them in the category of the finest of the country.

Musical instruments

Like their Western counterparts, Indian music instruments broadly belong to three different categories: wind instruments, string instruments and percussion instruments. While percussion instruments usually set the tempo of the song and provide a background, wind and string instruments control the melody of the music. In a simple sense, wind and string

instruments dictate the *sur* of the music, while percussion instruments dictate the *taal* of the song.

Most Indian percussion instruments have a layer of membrane, which is hit by the hand rhythmically to generate a tempo. While functionally similar to a drum, Indian instruments are rarely played using sticks, and are mostly played with bare hands. Smaller instruments such as the *dholki* have only one side, while instruments such as the *tabla* and the *dhol* have two striking surfaces.

The *Tabla*, in particular, is much more complicated in working than a drum, since all the effects created out of 6 different drums in a Western drum sets have to be created by the two drums of a tabla – called the *tabla* and the *dagga* or *baaya*. Thus, there are a wide variety of musical *taals* and strokes that can be created with a *tabla* and a *dhol*.



The left drum is called the Dagga or baaya and the right one is called the Tabla. It has been an important component of Indian music for many decades now.

On the other hand, wind and string instruments work in a very similar way to their Western counterparts, such as a guitar and a sitar. These instruments dictate the melody as well as the overall mood of the song.

They work on the same scale as the vocals do, and can be tuned to match the vocal range of the person singing the song. There is a rhythmic repetition of notes on the instrument, such as at an interval of 12 frets in a sitar. The bansuri and the sitar have long been associated with devotional music, and are much more prominent in Hindustani music as compared to other music styles of the subcontinent.



The sitar is just one instrument in a family of instruments, such as taanpura, veena and ektara, which all work on the same principles.

Music in Indian movies

Music in India movies has always played an important part, and was involved in movies ever since the first silent movie was released. The music of a movie today helps in determining

how much business a movie will do. The music sets the tone of the movie, and a single movie often has songs that cover a wide range of music styles.

In the 1930s, many of the actors and actresses sang their own songs. Along with acting skills and looks, music had become an important criterion for someone to be an actor, and people such as Bal Gandharva and Baburao Pendharkar were the select few who could do all of it. The concept of a 'playback singer' did not exist at that time. Songs had to be recorded along with the shooting, and the entire orchestra used to be present at the shooting. Nurjahan, Suraiya, Surendra, Ashok Kumar, M.S. Subbulakshmi and K.L. Sehgal were all actors and actresses who could sing well. Noted music directors of the time were Pankaj Mullick, Keshavrao Bhole, and Anil Biswas.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the business began to shift away from the big motion picture studios to independent producers. New musicians and music directors emerged. The distribution networks began to rely heavily on a certain number of songs, number of dances, etc. 'Formula' music became the trend there were a certain number of songs, with a certain set variety. The concept of a playback singer was introduced. The earlier artistes acted and sang, but the movies of this period had actors who did not sign their own songs and instead had other singers do this for them.



Kishore Kumar, along with contemporaries artists such as Mukesh, popularised the concept of a playback singer.

Film music derived its melodies from three diverse sources: Indian classical music, folk music from different regions, and Western classical and popular music. Initial music directors adapted and modified music from these sources to create a music tradition suitable to the common man. At this time, the use of the orchestra was minimal and the music director displayed his musical abilities with the help of very few musical instruments. This did not, however, take away from the music its melody and charm.

Many new and promising music directors emerged during the 1950s, including S.D. Burman, Jaidev, and Sudhir Phadke. The role of the lyricists, who drew inspiration from poetry and literature, played a major role in enriching the music of the time. Songs conveyed a meaning owing to their rich lyrics. Music during this time was light music, and hugely influenced by Indian classical music. The lyrics were usually about the love story of the protagonists, or evoked other profound emotions.

Geeta Dutt, Talat Mehmood, Mukesh and Kishore Kumar were great singers who, in company with the music directors and the lyricists, produced some of the best music Bollywood has ever seen. These singers sang not only in Hindi and Urdu, but in other Indian languages as well. Music in Indian films is generally not conceived as an autonomous entity within itself, but instead is intimately connected to the storyline.



Sisters Asha Bhosle and Lata Mangeshkar ruled the roost in playback singing for over seven decades.

In the 1960s and 1970s, playback singers such as Lata Mangeshkar, Hemant Kumar, Asha Bhonsle, Kishore Kumar, and Mohammad Rafi were the mainstay of the playback singing scene. Shankar-Jaikishan, Kalyanji Anandji, R.D. Burman and Laxmikant-Pyarelal emerged as the talented and big music directors over the two decades. The music of this time was usually slow and melodious, and very rarely had fast paced dance numbers that have now become synonymous with Bollywood.

By the end of the 1970s, film music began losing its golden image. Softness and subtle nuances of music gave way to fast, loud and orchestral forms, but not necessarily in a negative sense. Music was slowly becoming more influenced by western music, and genres such as disco and pop made their way into mainstream Bollywood music. R.D. Burman, Laxmikant-Pyarelal and Bappi Lahiri were some of the popular music directors of the 1980s who tried to adapt their music to suit the new kinds of films that were emerging.

In the years since the mid 1990s A.R. Rahman is one of the music composers to have revolutionised Hindi film music, and has inspired countless others to add new nuances to it.

Legends of Indian Music

Miya Tansen

The stories about Tansen are fact and fiction mixed together, but undoubtedly Tansen was one of the very few who had such a strong hold on Urdu as well as Hindustani music. A member of the court of Akbar, Tansen was a highly respected vocalist, and had mastered Hindustani music. Born as a Hindu in Gwalior, his position at Akbar's court help him get exposure to different kinds of music. He composed several ragas, which are all prefixed 'Miyan ki' in his honour, like the 'Miyan ki Todi'.

It is said that Tansen could do miracles with his music. According to legend his performance of *Raag Deepak* once lit up all the lamps in Akbar's court, while his rendition of *Raag Megh Malhar* caused heavy rains, to the delight of distraught people in the kingdom. It is also said

that his music could soothe wild animals. While it is difficult to determine how much of these tales are true, what is certain is that Miya Tansen was one of the pioneers of Indian music in medieval times.



Tansen was one of the Navratnas (nine gems) of Akbar's court.

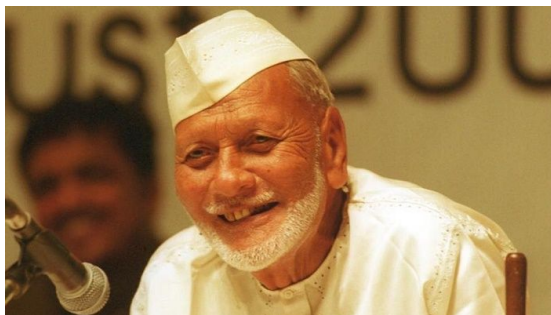
Kumar Gandharva



Born Shivaputra Siddharamayya Komkalimath, but named *Kumar Gandharva* owing to his being a child prodigy. He was an Indian classical singer, well known for his unique vocal style and his refusal to be bound by the tradition of any *gharana*. A *gandharva* is a musical spirit in Hindu mythology.

Ustad Bismillah Khan

Respectfully known as “Ustaad” in the music community, Bismillah Khan was the foremost exponent of the *shehnai*, a wind instrument popularly used in the Indian subcontinent. His concerts singlehandedly made the *shehnai* popular among the Indian masses, and he loved his art so much that he often referred to the *shehnai* as his “Begum”, or wife. Bismillah Khan had the privilege of performing at the Red Fort in 1947, on the occasion of India’s independence from the British. He was awarded the India’s highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, by the Indian Government.



Ustad Bismillah Khan took an instrument which was relatively unknown, and built his entire legacy around it.

M.S. Subbulakshmi

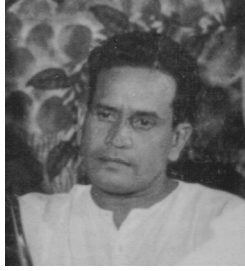
Madurai Shanmukhavadiyu Subbulakshmi was an Indian Carnatic singer, and perhaps the most prominent person of the Carnatic music style since the Holy Trinity in the 18th century. She started her career at the young age of 13, and never looked back. Most of her performances were religious in nature, and she would very frequently sing *bhajans* and give performances in prominent places of worship.

She was praised by every musician of her era, with Lata Mangeshkar calling her a *Tapaswani*, meaning someone who lives a simple life, unaffected by physical pleasures, and gives herself up to the spiritual and the sublime. She was also the first music artiste to be awarded the Bharat Ratna. She was one of the leading personalities in the field of Carnatic and semi-classical music. Despite being at the top of the field, she was humility and simplicity personified, which was something that she taught newer generations of artistes and musicians.



She lived a life devoid of publicity, money and fame, and let her performances speak for themselves.

Pandit Bhimsen Joshi



Bhimsen Gururaj Joshi was an Indian singer from Maharashtra , an exponent of the Hindustani classical tradition. He is known for the *khayal* form of singing, as well as for his popular renditions of devotional music (*bhajans* and *abhangs*). He was honoured with the Bharat Ratna in 2009.

Pandit Ravi Shankar

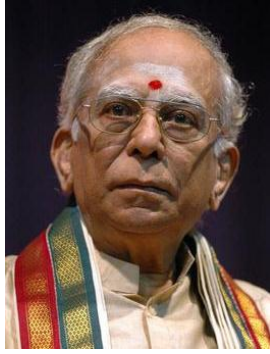


Pandit Ravi Shankar was an Indian musician and composer of Hindustani classical music from Bengal. He was one of the best-known proponents of the *sitar* in the latter half of the 20th century and influenced many other musicians throughout the world.

He also worked as a composer, creating the music for the *Apu Trilogy* by Satyajit Ray , and was music director of All India Radio, New Delhi, from 1949 to 1956.

In 1956, Shankar began to tour Europe and the Americas playing Indian classical music and increased its popularity there in the 1960s through teaching, performance, and his association with violinist Yehudi Menuhin and the Beatles guitarist George Harrison. His influence on the latter helped popularise the use of Indian instruments in pop music throughout the 1960s. From 1986 to 1992, he served as a nominated member of Rajya Sabha. In 1999, Shankar was awarded India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna.

Lalgudi Jayaraman



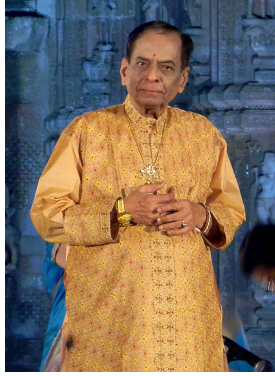
Lalgudi Gopala Iyer Jayaraman was a Carnatic violinist, vocalist and composer. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2001. He expanded the style of violin playing by inventing a whole new technique that is designed to best suit the needs of Indian Classical Music and establishing a unique style that came to be known as '*Lalgudi Bani*'. Jayaraman composed several *kritis*, *tillanas*, *varnams* and dance compositions, which are a blend of *raga*, *bhava*, rhythm and lyrical beauty.

Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia



Born in 1938, Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia is an Indian classical flautist, who plays the *bansuri*, an Indian bamboo flute in the Hindustani classical tradition. He had to learn music without his father's knowledge, as his father wanted him to become a wrestler. He did go to the traditional wrestling school or *akhada* and train with his father for some time, but simultaneously also started learning music and practising the *bansuri* at his friend's house. He has been honoured with the Padma Vibhushan in 2000.

Balamurali Krishna



Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna was a Carnatic vocalist, musician, multi-instrumentalist, playback singer, composer, and character actor. He began his career aged 6, and his concerts combined sophisticated vocal skills and rhythmic patterns of classical music and were popular across the world. He was honoured with the Padma Vibhushan in 1991.

Ustad Zakir Hussain



Known both for his free flowing hair, and his free flowing fingers on a *tabla*. Son of Ustad Allahrakha Khan, Zakir Hussain, from a very young age, followed the works of his predecessors – Pandit Ravi Shankar and Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasiya – who were legends of Indian music in their own right. Zakir Hussain reinvented the art of playing tabla, so that the tabla player was not just a musician who set the background for the vocalist, but was as important as the rest of the ensemble.

Zakir Hussain is a part of multiple Grammy Award winning albums, has won countless awards in International film festivals and has also won a National Award for his work. His passion for music has led to a younger generation falling in love with Indian classical music, and Zakir is a role model for many budding artists of tomorrow. He was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 2002.

Ustad Amjad Ali Khan



Ustad Amjad Ali Khan is the foremost exponent of the sarod. Son of a Gwalior court musician Hafiz Ali Khan and his wife Rahat Jahan, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan is descended from the Bangash line, and is a 6th generation musician. Interestingly, his family claims to having invented the *Sarod*. He has been honoured with the Padma Vibhushan in 2001.

Pandit Shivkumar Sharma



Pandit Shivkumar Sharma is India's foremost and best known exponent of the *santoor*. He is credited with making the *santoor* a popular classical instrument. Apart from classical music at which he excelled, he has also composed music for select Hindi films in collaboration with Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia- under the screen name 'Shiv-Hari'. Some films for which the duo have composed music include *Silsila*, *Chandni* and *Lamhe*. He was honoured with the Padma Vibhushan in 2001.

Ilaiyaraaja



Ilaiyaraaja is an Indian film music composer, singer, songwriter, instrumentalist, orchestrator, conductor-arranger and lyricist. He is credited for introducing western musical sensibilities into mainstream Indian music. Ilaiyaraaja is equally known for integrating Indian folk music and traditional Indian instrumentation with western classical music techniques. He was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 2018.

Dr L. Subramaniam



Dr. Lakshminarayana Subramaniam is an acclaimed Indian violinist, composer and conductor, trained in the classical Carnatic music tradition and Western classical music, and renowned for his virtuoso playing techniques and compositions in orchestral fusion. He is married to reputed Bollywood playback singer Kavita Krishnamurthi.

U. Srinivas



Uppalapu Srinivas was a mandolin player and a composer in Carnatic classical music. He was the first musician to use the electric mandolin in Carnatic music: he modified the electric western instrument, using five single strings instead of the traditional four doubled strings to suit the Carnatic pitch, *raga* system, and especially *gamakas*, or nuanced oscillations. He was awarded the Padmashri in 1998.

Kishori Amonkar



Kishori Amonkar was a leading Indian classical vocalist, belonging to the Jaipur *Gharana*. She was a performer of the classical genre *khayal* and the light classical genres such as *thumris* and *bhajans*. Amonkar trained under her mother, classical singer Mogubai Kurdikar also from the Jaipur *gharana*, but she experimented with a variety of vocal styles in her career. She was honoured with the Padma Vibhushan in 2002.