

Lyre



Harappan Lyre

Harp



Original Veena, Yasz

Lute



Sitar



Sarangi

Zither



Swarmandel



Rudra Veena

To understand the history of the sitar, we need to understand the different string instrument groups:

1. Lutes: The characteristic structure consists of an enclosed resonator with strings passing over all or part of it, and a neck along which the strings are stretched. Players move their fingers up and down the neck, thus shortening the the strings and producing different pitches. Examples of lutes are: the veena, the violin, the sarangi, the cello
2. Zithers In a Zither the strings are, as in the lute, parallel to the resonator. The difference is that the resonator and the strings have the same length whereas in the lute the neck is not a resonator, but an attachment. There are many different types of Zithers; in some the player can shorten the strings (stick zither), in others not (box zithers). The Santur is a Zither. The Rudra Veena is a stick Zither. Since the sound body is shaped like a stick, it is called a stick zither.
3. Harps: In a harp the strings stand in an angle away from the sound body. Each string can only produce 1 note.
4. Lyre: It is similar to a harp in the sense that one string is used for one note, but the position of the strings are different as the picture clearly shows



Make your own drawing of a Lute, Zither, Harp and Lyre. You can chose which ones. What type of instrument is an electric guitar? a bass? a santoor?



Harappan music

The oldest string instruments found in India, were lyres and harps. The veena described in the Natya Shastra, was not a lute as the modern version, but a harp. The word 'veena' was a generic term to indicate all string instruments. In Tamil the word for this harp is Yasz. In the 10th century we can find descriptions of many different veenas. In the 12th century Sangeet Ratnakar, we find descriptions of lutes, zithers and harps. The ones of interest for the development of the sitar is the Tritankari Veena, a 3 stringed lute and seen by some musicologists as one of the most influential ancestors of the modern sitar.



Harappan Lyre



The original Veena or Yasz



From Persia, a long necked lute, the Tanbur was brought to India around in the 10th century. The famous Amir Khusrau of Delhi played the Tanbur and was instrumental in combining Indian and Persian music traditions. The tanbur combined with local instruments and led to development of the Tanbura (unfretted tanbur) and the sitar. The instrument that gave the sitar its name, is the sehtar, another Persian instrument which means 3 strings.

The sitar is a result of the coming together of many different string instruments from the Indian subcontinent and the instruments brought to India by invaders.

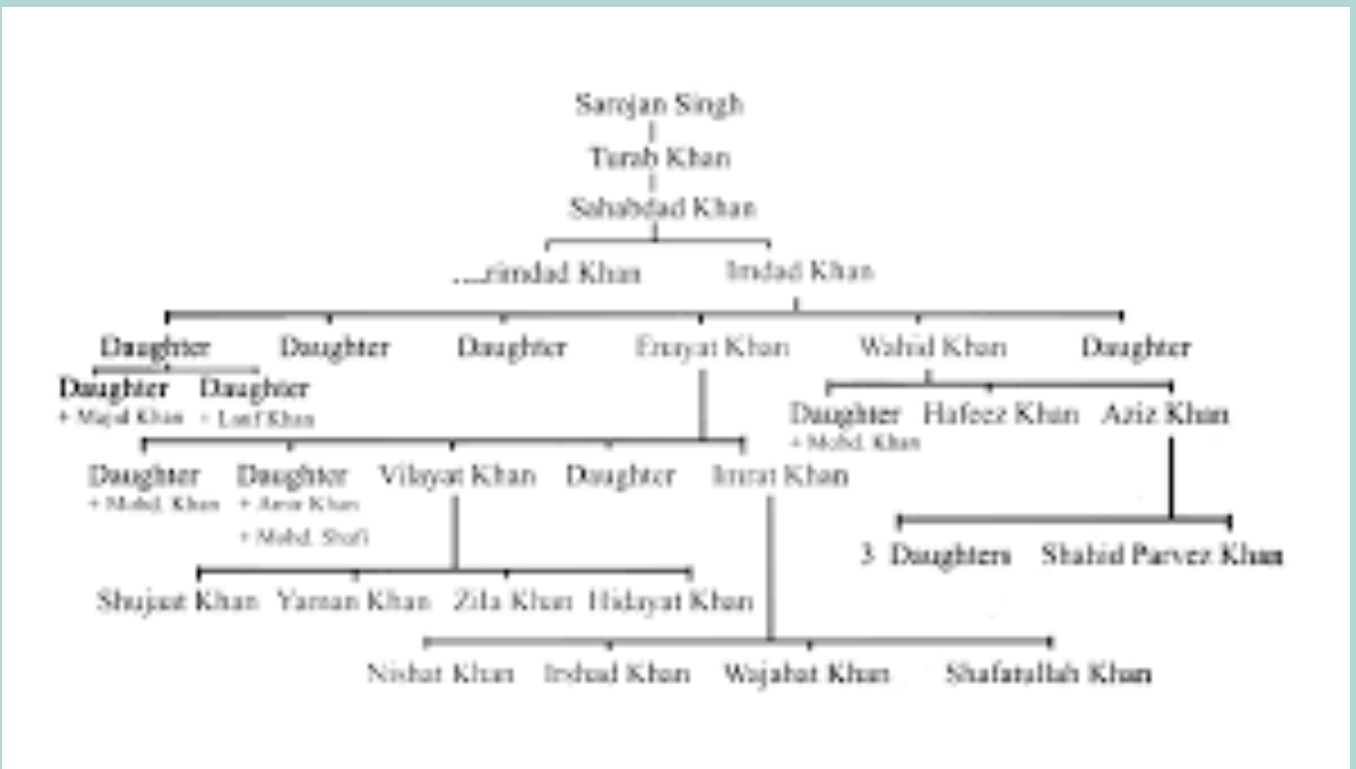
Sometimes Amir Khusrau is credited with the invention of the instrument. It is however more likely that an 18th century 'Khusrau Khan' was the first sitar player. The similarity in the two names, led to the confusion about the inventor of the instrument.

What did the original veena look like?



In the early days of the sitar, the instrument was not used as a solo instrument, but as an accompanying instrument as a part of an ensemble. It was from the early 19th century that the sitar gradually became more popular as a solo instrument too. Some early recordings by Ustad Imdad Khan are still very famous.

[Listen to this beautiful recording.](#) Us. Imdad Khan (1848-1920) was the very first solo sitar instrumentalist to be recorded on disc. Born in Agra and raised in the nearby town of Etawah in Uttar Pradesh, he studied with his father, Sahabdad Khan, who familiarized Imdad with sitar, sarangi, and khyal, (Sahabdad's brother Haddu was a famed khyal singer). He also studied with veena master Bande Ali Khan (1830-1890). Gradually, he transformed Indian sitar playing, creating his own, incredibly popular style. He is the founder of the Imdadkhani or Etawah Gharana of sitar playing. In the 20th century, Us Imdad Khan's grandson, Us. Vilayat Khan became world renowned for his contribution to the 'gayaki ang' of sitar playing and innovations to his instrument.



Gradually during the 20th century the sitar became more famous. Other sitarists at this time were: Pandit Bimal Mukherjee [1930-1996] of the Jaipur gharana, Pandit Manilal Nag of the Bishnupur gharana, Ustad Abdul Halim Jaffar Khan of the Indore gharana, Ustad Mushtaq Ali Khan of the Senia gharana who have made important contributions to the development of the sitar.

However, the real explosion of the popularity of the sitar came from the second half of the 20th century. Post independence became the 'era of instrumental music' in India. Indian musicians became famous all around the world, performed at the most prestigious venues and started their own music schools and Gurukuls all over the globe. Indian instrumental music became an important part of world heritage and not confined to Indian culture and heritage. The most famous sitarist and musician who was instrumental in the acceptance of Indian music around the world is the great Bharat Ratna Pandit Ravi Shankar.

Who was the first sitar player to record? What was his grandson's name?