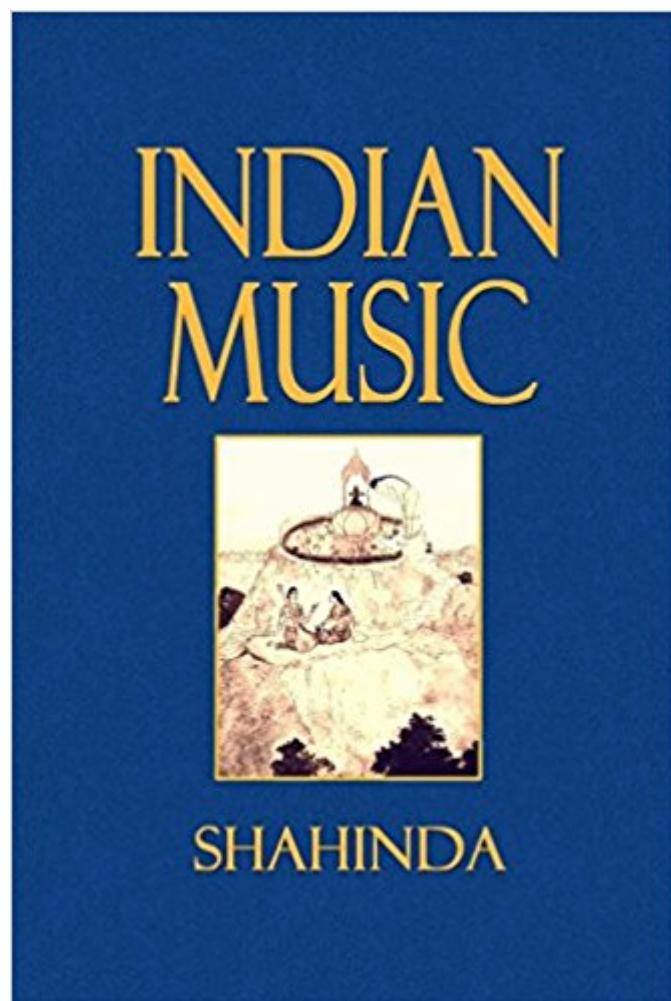


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Indian Music



Synopsis

From the Preface:> THIS little book is a modest attempt to explain to Western minds the construction, peculiarities and spirit of the ancient music of India. Captain Day, in his illuminating volume on the music of the Decan, or Southern India, has revealed the elaborate system which prevailed at one time in that portion of the Empire, but this is only the offshoot of the original system, which had its birth and growth in the North in ages which recede from the tract of history into the dim regions of legendary lore. Much that is described in these pages may seem to pertain to the imagination rather than the possibility of practice, but the points of view of the Eastern and Western brain are as far asunder as the social systems of Eastern and Western realms. One great fundamental fact with regard to their respective musical outlook is that whereas the Western musician concentrates his attention on the centre of each note forming a scale, and his ears will tolerate no variation from that central point, the Eastern musician concentrates his attention on the gradations of pitch between the centre of each note. Where the Western musician strides from note to note, his Eastern brother glides between. To the latter the approach and the leaving the central point is all important. It is this that has in the course of ages led to the wondrous system of varied treatment of subtle tonal gradations, and to the multiplication of ornamentations, well nigh infinitesimal in number and character. So delicate and subtle are these gradations that it is only cultivated ears that can perceive them, and recognise their endless variety and significance. The ability of the trained Indian musician to infuse his individuality by almost endless variations on what may be termed the skeleton of the tune is practically unknown to Europeans. Much Indian Music has little or no meaning to Western ears owing to inability to detect and appreciate tone-shading as varied and as fleeting as a summer rainbow. The origin of these fine gradations of pitch undoubtedly was, and has been developed in great measure by, the thinness and length of the strings used on the ancient classical Indian instruments. That there should have been little endeavour to thicken these strings or to obtain greater resonance and power must be attributed to the predilection of the Eastern mind to subtlety of thought which found its reflection satisfied in musical sounds of delicate quality. The music of all countries is ever the echo of the idiosyncrasies and mental states of its producers, and the extreme delicacy of Indian music is only the faithful analogue in sound of the elaborate and marvellous complexity of eastern pattern-making, as seen in its greatest developments in the weavings in silk and wool, the symbolical meanings of which can only be perceived by the initiated. Yet more elusive and evasive is the music of ancient India which revels in the gossamars of thought and strivings to make audible the vague dreamings of the mystic East. à "F. GILBERT WEBB.

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