

See it. Hear it. Understand why it matters.

DISCOVER THE VICHITRA VEENA

AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE

An introduction to the Vichitra Veena,
its structure, sound, importance, artists,
innovation and learning path.



Created by Dr. Radhika Veenasadhika

World's First Woman Vichitra Veena Player

An educational initiative of
Veena Venu Art Foundation and
International Vichitra Veena Council (IVVC)



Veena Venu Legacy Gurukul
VEENA VENU ART FOUNDATION

Approximate Course Time: 20–25 Minutes

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE VICHITRA VEENA?



Traditional Vichitra Veena

The Vichitra Veena is a rare, fretless Indian string instrument and the refined modern form of the ancient Ektantri Veena. In earlier traditions, related forms of this Veena were known as Brahma Veena, Ghosha Veena, Ghoshika and Ghoshavati. It is also known as the Batta Been, referring to its distinctive slide-based playing method.

It belongs primarily to the Hindustani classical music tradition and is celebrated for its deep meend, continuous movement of swaras and exceptionally rich tonal expression.

WHAT DOES THE NAME MEAN?

The word Vichitra means extraordinary, unusual, remarkable or beyond the ordinary.

The name is appropriate because both the appearance and the playing technique of the instrument are distinctive. Unlike most familiar string instruments, the Vichitra Veena does not use frets to divide the notes. The performer creates swaras by moving a glass gatta smoothly over the strings.

This freedom from fixed frets gives the instrument its extraordinary musical identity.

HOW IS IT PLAYED?

The Vichitra Veena is placed horizontally in front of the performer. The strings are plucked with a mizrab, worn on a finger of the right hand.

The left hand moves a smooth glass gatta across the strings. A paperweight may also be used as a glass gatta. Dr. Radhika Veenasadhika plays the Vichitra Veena with a specially selected Shivling-shaped glass gatta.



Shivling-shaped glass gatta

Used by Dr. Radhika Veenasadhika for the continuous movement of swaras and controlled meend.

MAIN STRUCTURAL FEATURES

The Vichitra Veena has a long fretless body called the dand, supported by two large resonating gourds called tumbas. Its principal structural and musical features include:

- A long fretless dand
- Two large resonating tumbas
- Nine main strings, including chikari strings
- Thirteen sympathetic strings
- Two bridges
- Tuning pegs
- Manka or moti used for fine adjustment
- Main playing strings
- Chikari strings
- Sympathetic strings
- A glass gatta, paperweight or Shivling-shaped glass gatta for producing swaras

The exact dimensions and structural arrangement may vary according to the traditional instrument, the maker and the model used by the performer.

WHY DOES IT HAVE NO FRETS?

The Vichitra Veena has no frets because its musical purpose is not to divide sound into rigid fixed points.

Its fretless surface allows the musician to travel freely through the complete tonal space between swaras. This gives the instrument the exceptional power to present Indian classical music, and vocal music of any tradition, with profound completeness, fluidity and expression.

Through uninterrupted meend, subtle shrutis and continuous swara movement, the Vichitra Veena can carry the depth, delicacy and emotional detail of the human voice with extraordinary effectiveness.

WHAT IS MEEND?

Meend is the continuous movement from one swara to another. Instead of producing two separate notes, the musician allows the sound to travel through the tonal space between them.

On the Vichitra Veena, this movement can be long, deep and extremely subtle. The performer can shape the journey of a swara, control its speed and reveal delicate tonal shades between the beginning and ending notes.

WHAT MAKES ITS SOUND UNIQUE?

The sound of the Vichitra Veena is not limited to separate notes. A swara can rise, bend, glide, sustain and gently merge into another swara.

Its distinctive sound emerges from the relationship between the fretless dand, the glass gatta, the strings, the two bridges, the tumbas and the sympathetic strings.

- Deep and uninterrupted meend
- Continuous swara movement
- Subtle control of shruti
- Sustained resonance
- Rich sympathetic vibration
- The ability to express both power and sweetness

The Vichitra Veena is regarded as the mother of Indian musical instruments and as the refined modern form of the ancient Ektantri Veena. Its unmatched sliding effect, continuous flow of swaras and extraordinary tonal depth are found in no other instrument. It represents one of the highest, sweetest and most unique expressions of Indian music.

A LIVING AND EVOLVING VEENA

The Vichitra Veena is not merely an instrument of the past. It is a living Indian classical instrument that continues to be played, taught, researched, developed and presented today.

Its construction, tonal possibilities and methods of learning have continued to evolve through the work of musicians, teachers, researchers and instrument makers.

One important modern development is the Radhika Model Vichitra Veena, created to address practical difficulties connected with the traditional instrument, including its large size, weight, portability and accessibility for learners.

The Radhika Model is smaller, lighter and easier to handle, while preserving the fretless identity, deep meend and essential tonal character of the Vichitra Veena. Its design, improved tonal possibilities, development and advantages will be presented in a separate chapter.

LOOK AND LISTEN

Observe the photograph of the Vichitra Veena and identify the long fretless dand, two large tumbas, main strings, chikari strings, sympathetic strings, bridges and tuning pegs.

Listening Link 1: [Insert clickable audio or video link here]

Watching Link 1: [Insert short performance video link here]

While listening, notice how the swaras move continuously. While watching, observe how one hand plucks the strings and the other hand moves the glass gatta.

REMEMBER

The Vichitra Veena is a rare, fretless Indian string instrument played with a mizrab and a glass gatta. It is known for deep meend, continuous swara movement, subtle shrutis and rich resonant sound.

QUICK LEARNING CHECK

1. What makes the Vichitra Veena different from many other string instruments?

- A. It has no strings
- B. It is fretless and played with a glass gatta
- C. It is played by blowing air into it

2. What is the continuous movement from one swara to another called?

- A. Meend
- B. Taal
- C. Theka

3. How many main strings, including chikari strings, are described in this course?

- A. Nine
- B. Thirteen
- C. Two

4. How many sympathetic strings are described in this course?

- A. Nine
- B. Thirteen
- C. Twenty-two

5. Which glass gatta is used by Dr. Radhika Veenasadhika?

- A. Shivling-shaped glass gatta
- B. Wooden stick
- C. Metal bow

The answers will be included in the final Course Completion Check.

CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

- The Vichitra Veena is the refined modern form of the ancient Ektantri Veena.
- It was also known through names such as Brahma Veena, Ghosha Veena, Ghoshika, Ghoshavati and Batta Been.

- It is fretless and is played with a mizrab and a glass gatta.
- It has nine main strings including chikari strings, thirteen sympathetic strings and two bridges.
- Its fretless design enables deep meend, subtle shruti and continuous swara movement.
- It possesses an exceptional capacity to express Indian classical and vocal music.
- The Radhika Model Vichitra Veena represents an important modern innovation and will be explored in a later chapter.

NEXT CHAPTER

Structure and Parts of the Vichitra Veena