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# MUSIC OF INDIA

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A Program of The Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall

TEACHER GUIDE

 The Weill Music Institute  
at Carnegie Hall

**CARNEGIE HALL**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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*Delivery of The Weill Music Institute's programs to national audiences is funded in part by the US Department of Education and by an endowment grant from the Citi Foundation.*

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## INTRODUCTION TO INDIA AND ITS MUSIC

The musical sounds of India are part of vast historical, cultural, and spiritual traditions that date back thousands of years. This introduction offers a glimpse into India's complex history.

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There are four main regions of India, each with its own musical traditions. In North India, the classical musical traditions, known as Hindustani music, have origins in Sanskrit texts, and are influenced by Hindu, Muslim, and Persian cultures. The basic concepts of these classical music traditions are melody and rhythm. Sameer Gupta is part of the Hindustani musical tradition. In Northwest and West India, the predominant musical styles are bhangra music from the Punjab and Rajasthani folk music. Rajasthan, which is located south of the Punjab region, is known for its rich court heritage and its lively musician communities. West Bengal in East India is home to a community of Bengalis who were at the center of various land disputes and rebellions following the partition. The Baul communities in Bangladesh and West Bengal share a mystical folk religious music that features prominently in this region. In the four states of South India (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala) South Indian classical music is the predominant musical tradition.

Around 3,000 BCE, the civilizations of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa rose around the Indus River valley in what is now India and Pakistan. In about 1,500 BCE, Indo-Europeans (later called Aryans) from north of the Caspian Sea spread throughout the Indus Valley region and moved toward the Ganges River in the east. The Aryans used Sanskrit as the primary language, and their polytheistic beliefs (in multiple gods) were transmitted orally. Aryan religious hymns, prayers, verses, formulas, and spells were written down centuries later in four texts, called the Vedas. The mixing of Aryan and Indus Valley religions, rituals, beliefs, and ideas formed the foundation of Hinduism.

Persians, Greeks, and Aryan tribes ruled various portions of the Indus Valley from 600–300 BCE. In 563 BCE, Siddhartha Gautama was born in Nepal. The son of a king, Siddhartha saw the results of man's desires, and gave up his possessions to search for answers to life's questions. He became known as Buddha, or "the Enlightened One." In the early third century BCE (during the Mauryan Empire), the great leader Ashoka converted to Buddhism and advocated the religion throughout the area.

After the fall of the Mauryan Empire and centuries of rule by smaller kingdoms and republics, the powerful Gupta Empire emerged in 320 CE. During this period, known as the Classical or Golden Age, Hindu culture thrived, and literature, art, and architecture proliferated throughout the Indus Valley. The city of Ayodha became the capital, and aspects of modern Hinduism—such as image worship and devotional practices—became part of everyday life. The Gupta Empire was weakened from Central Asian invaders, and, in the late sixth century, independent kingdoms and states, each with its own language and culture, formed the area we now know as India. For the next 500 years, trade with Rome, China, and Arab areas spread religion and goods throughout the region.

The 10th through 15th centuries brought a growth of Islam as Turks from central Asia and other Islamic followers began to invade the area. In the early 13th century, the Sultanates of Delhi ruled in several northern dynasties, but were unsuccessful in conquering the southern areas. Two independent kingdoms in the south, one Muslim and one Hindu, were formed. The western area of Goa was conquered by the Portuguese in the early 14th century and remained in their control until 1961.



In 1525, Muslims from the northwest conquered the Indus Valley and founded the Mughal Empire. Two of the six great rulers of the Mughal Empire—Babur and his grandson Akbar the Great—showed tolerance toward Hindus and other non-Muslims. Most of the Mughal leaders were great patrons of the arts, and music became a part of court entertainment. In the late 15th century, Hindu-born Guru Nanak founded the Sikh religion. Nanak and the gurus who succeeded him lived in the Punjab in northern India, and the city of Amritsar became the center of Sikhism. Aurangzeb was the last of the great Mughal leaders, and his oppressive policies, such as a reintroduction of a tax on non-Muslims, resulted in rebellions by Hindus and Sikhs. Mughal rule lasted until 1857, when the British drove the last emperor into exile.

By 1600, the English East India Company had established commerce on the subcontinent and gradually took control as Mughal power weakened. In the mid-1700s, the British government and East India Company became more interested in land and power than trade, and gained control around an important base near Calcutta in the east. As the East India Company extended its control, British reforms drew anger from Hindus and Muslims. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 (led by native soldiers) was eventually defeated by the British, but the British attempt to bring their way of life to India was weakened and traditional practices continued. While the struggle for independence brought national unity, there were still strong regional ties to language, religion, and ethnic groups.

The Indian National Congress (INC), composed of the new professional class, was formed in 1885 and aired grievances to the British. Mahatma Gandhi became leader of the INC in 1920 and worked to encourage nationalist ideals to the Hindu masses. While Gandhi looked to bridge the gap between Muslims and Hindus, Muhammad Ali Jinnah of the All-Muslim League moved to partition India. In 1947, India gained independence and partition, with Jawaharlal Nehru, president of the Congress party, as prime minister. Muslims received the countries of West and East Pakistan, on opposite sides of the country. In 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by Hindu extremists who opposed his political and religious beliefs.

After independence, India was organized into 30 states, largely reflecting ethnic divisions. These states were reorganized often between the 1950s and the 1980s, and complex conflicts arose in different regions. Conflicts between Sikhs and Hindus reached a height in 1984 when the Indian army invaded the Golden Temple of Amritsar, which had been occupied by Sikh militants. The temple was destroyed, and 1,000 people died. In the 1990s, a dispute over the Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodha, built by the Mughal emperor Babur and the sacred birthplace of the Hindu god Ram, resulted in the destruction of the mosque and violence throughout the country. The territory between India and Pakistan in the Kashmir region in the north continues to be disputed today.

India's diverse cultural history is reflected in musical practices throughout the country. The sounds of Sikh devotional songs in the northwestern state of Punjab, billboards advertising the latest Hindi films, and brass bands at weddings and celebrations are just some of the traditions that are a part of everyday life. India is the largest of the eight South Asian countries and has three main physical areas: the Himalayan mountains in the north, the central plains around the Ganges River, and the southern peninsula of plains, plateaus, valleys, and mountains. Each of these topographical areas is home to many regions, states, cultures, and ethnicities.

*Reprinted from "Sounds of India" 2004–2005 Teacher Guide, published by The Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall.*



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