

Scales are not Ragas. Notes are not swaras.

Common Mistake: Playing Scale Notes Thinking It's a Raga. Careful with oversimplified misinformation. Here's what you need to know:

C Major Scale To Raga

The C Major Scale notes:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

C D E F G A B C

How do we find the swaras? Ri is not the same as the D note or Ma is not same as F.

To get the equivalent carnatic Raga, we need to add the following extra information to some of the scale positions, based on the raga rule (*see notation and tab below*):

Raga Position 2 (Ri): C → E → D, Scale Position 4 (Ma): F → E → F

Scale Position 6 (Dha): G → C' → A, Scale Position 7 (Ni): A → C' → B

(→ = slide movement, C' = higher octave C)

The ascend rule for the major scale Raga Shankarabharanam:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8					
	Sa	Ri	Ga	Ma	Pa	Dha	Ni	Sa					
	C	C/E\	D	E	F\E/F	G	G/C\	A	A/C\	B	C		
e		-----											
B		-1--	1/5\	3--	5--	6\5/	6--	3--	3/8\	5--	5/8\	7--	8--
G		-----											
D		-----											
A		-----											
E		-----											

Similarly there are descend rules you can apply to the major scale to know what to do when coming from a higher note to a lower note.

Watch this rather popular youtube video to see it in action <link to ragacourses page with the video>

Scales + Raga Rules = Raga

Many resources that connect raga for western instruments, over simplify, merely substituting swara names for the note names. But, you see from the tab and notes above that ragas have more information added to the notes in the form of gamakas — through slides and similar techniques — to shape them into raga music phrases.

Notes are the basic elements of music. We will learn how to make swaras out of notes, ragas out of scales, authentic Indian music phrases instead of note clusters.

What you get

We will take multiple scale examples, turn them into ragas.

I have linked to videos and articles that show you techniques, give you supporting material.

This book is not meant to be an encyclopedia - which is not possible in the case of something wide like music. I will give you the foundations and core required to change you from a scale player to start being a raga player, someone who understands what is expected and what is not enough. You will also have real life authentic phrases that you can actually play confidently.

We are often connecting scales to the ragas, since scales are established elements of music on a western instrument. Helps you store and connect the new information better, like in a thesaurus.

Slides

In the above image, the / and \ symbols indicate sliding from a lower-numbered fret to a higher-numbered fret, or from a higher-numbered fret to a lower-numbered fret, respectively.

To play a slide, strike only the first note of each slide cluster. Students may have this doubt in the beginning, so let us see an example.

For example, to play 3/8\5, press and strike the 3rd fret, then smoothly slide to the 8th fret while maintaining pressure on the string, ensuring the sound continues without interruption. After reaching the 8th fret, slide down to the 5th fret while keeping the string vibrating continuously.

In the beginning, use simpler exercises to practice the slides. We can device simple exercises based on real life music - "Fluency Mechanics."

For more information and exercises on fluent Indian guitar playing using slides, hammer-ons, and pull-offs, see this page.

If you haven't already, check out the free instruction videos on this page: Guitar basics that Matter - Subskills

In short:

Standard Tuned Guitar

As seen in the tab above, we use the standard-tuned guitar to play Indian music. Humans have been playing music on the standard-tuned guitar for a long time. We are familiar with scale patterns and the relative tuning between the strings. Instead of reinventing the wheel, we can connect this pattern knowledge with raga slides and comfortably play Indian music using the same underlying note structure.

Personally, I prefer this approach because I can play chords alongside Indian music without having to change the tuning of the strings. The Indian sound is primarily produced by the horizontal connection between the notes, which remains unaffected by any changes in the overall tuning of the strings.

Some musicians may choose to alter the tuning of their guitar to play Indian music, and they have their reasons. I would compare this choice to the freedom of selecting between Android or Apple operating systems. Modifications at the hardware level, like changing string tuning, are not an absolute requirement but rather a personal choice. For the purpose of this book, we stick with the usual standard tuning.

Tabs Are Important

Notes or notation alone are not enough to provide the information required to play authentic Indian raga.

To play Indian music fluently, with expression and the correct phrasing as it is sung, you need to use the exact string/fret combinations that will allow you to connect the notes using slides. Simply playing the notes from notation will not give you the musical result you desire.

Therefore, tabs are essential. At least in the beginning, you need to follow the exact string and fret combinations to understand the phrasing and finger logic. Just playing the notes anywhere will not yield the final musical outcome.

Strike - Syllable tally

In upcoming lessons, we will explore how to tally the number of strikes with the number of consonants and how to absorb strikes when playing extended vowels and ending sounds.

Each consonant gets a strike. Long vowels do not have strikes in between - the numbers are connected and played using slides, hammer ons and pull-offs.

To convey detailed expression and emulate vocal nuances on the guitar fretboard, we need to connect the sound using slides, hammer ons and pull offs. Clearly know where the vowel is extended and avoid striking in between, even if you have to move through multiple notes.