



# Getting started on Carnatic Flute

## Blowing and Basic Exercises



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# The Carnatic Flute – about the Instrument

## Carnatic Flute Anatomy

- The Carnatic Flute is made of bamboo
- One end is closed by the natural node of the bamboo
- The other end is open
- Has one blowing hole
- Has 8 holes for playing with fingers



## Basic Playing

- Only 6 holes are used for basic playing
- 7<sup>th</sup> playing hole is always closed with the pinky/ little finger
- 8<sup>th</sup> playing hole is always open



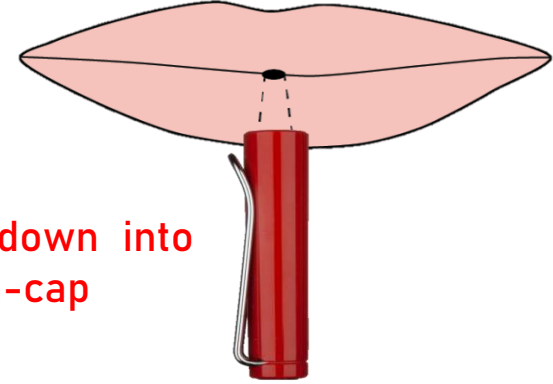
- So, for basic/ practical purposes, let us consider it as a six hole flute as below (7<sup>th</sup> hole Closed & 8<sup>th</sup> hole Open)
- We could also start with a flute which has 6 playing holes, and later switch to an 8 hole Carnatic flute later, for advanced lessons



# Blowing on the Flute

## Start with a Pen-Cap

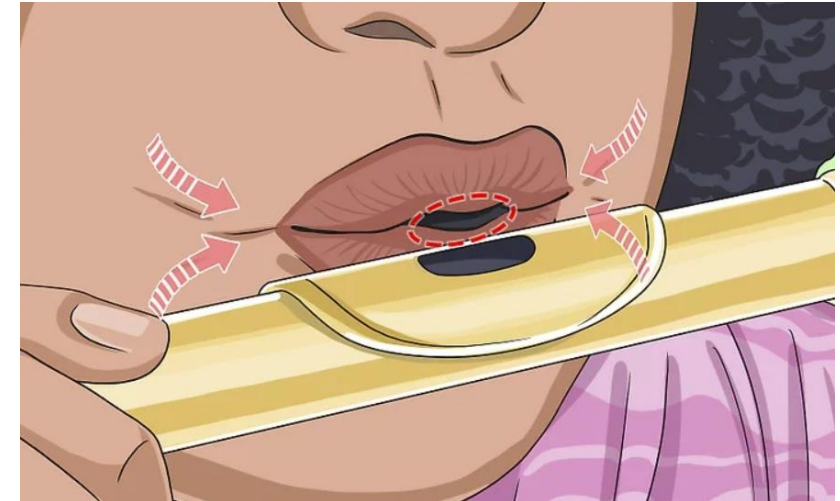
- Hold the pen-cap as in the picture
- Stretch your lips and make a small opening in the middle
- Now, blow downward into the Pen-cap, to make some sound
- Try this multiple times until you get good quality sound.



Step-1: Blow down into  
The Pen-cap

## Now, try blowing on the Flute

- Sit straight with your back straight, Look straight
- Stretch your lips as if you are saying the letter “P”. Keep your cheeks flat.
- Make a small opening in the middle of your lips
- Place the blowing hole on your lower lip, right below the blowing hole you just made (this specific shape of your lips and facial muscles is called the “**Embouchure**”
- Breathe in a lot of air
- Blow down using only your lips (Breathe out to the flute) as if you are saying “**Pooh**”
- Hold on to the blowing as long as you can
- Repeat blowing until you get a clean sound (sound quality improves and hissing noise reduces)



Step-2: Blow into  
The Flute

## [Check out this Excellent Video link on Flute blowing](#)

This link talks about blowing into a Western Metallic flute. However, blowing works exactly the same way, on a Carnatic Flute, too

# Your first note on the flute – “Ga”

## Let's play our first note (G) on the Flute

- Blow in to the flute with all holes Open
- Let's call this Note “G” (Ga in the “Sa Ri Ga Ma” scheme)
- Play and hold this note as long as you can.  
Note how many seconds you could hold – say, 5 seconds
- Keep doing this for many days and you will notice this duration will increase and the Note quality will improve



Note “G”  
(All holes OPEN)

## Reading Notes with Commas

- When you see a “Comma” in the notation, you hold the same note for additional seconds corresponding to each comma
- For example, “G , , “ You play “G” and hold it for 2 extra seconds (total 3 seconds note length)
- Now, play each line in the table below.

| NOTATION | What to do                                      | How to Read ALOUD    |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| G        | Play “G” for <b>1</b> second                    | Ga                   |
| G ,      | Play “G” and hold the blow for <b>2</b> Seconds | Ga, Two              |
| G , ,    | Play “G” and hold the blow for <b>3</b> Seconds | Ga, Two, Three       |
| G , , ,  | Play “G” and hold the blow for <b>4</b> Seconds | Ga, Two, Three, Four |

# Notes “Ri” & “Sa”

## Note “R”

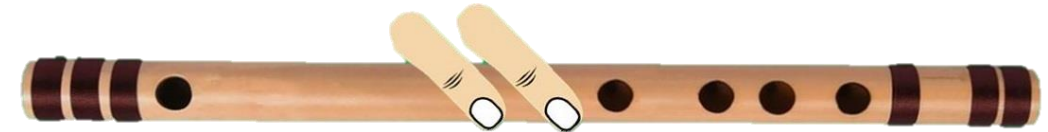
- Blow in to the flute with the first hole CLOSED
- This is “R” (**Ri** in the “Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni” scheme)
- Play and hold this note as long as you can.
- Keeping the finger inclined as in the picture, is advised



Note “R”  
( 1 hole CLOSED )

## Note “S”

- Blow in to the flute with the first **TWO** holes CLOSED
- This is “S” (**Sa** in the “Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni” scheme)
- Play and hold this note as long as you can.
- Keeping the finger inclined as in the picture, is advised
- If you blow **HARDER**, you will hear a High frequency sound.  
This is **HIGH** Sa denoted a Ṣ (dot above)

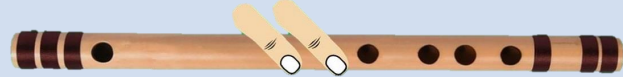


Note “S”  
( 2 holes CLOSED )

# Basic Exercises with S, R & G

**Now, let's play some Note patterns**

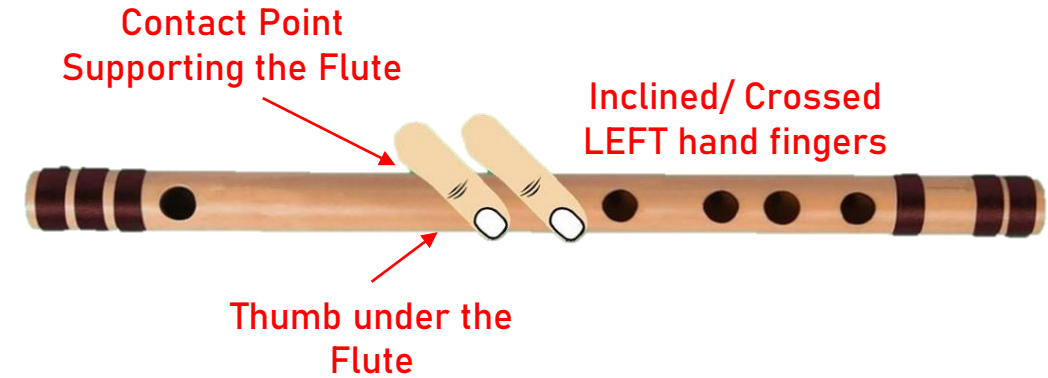
- Blow individually for each note
- Close the holes before blowing

|                |                                                                                      |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| G , , ,        |    |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |
| R , , ,        |    |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |
| S , , ,        |    |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |
| G,,, R,,, S,,, |   |   |   |
| S,,, R,,, G,,, |  |  |  |

# Holding the Carnatic Flute

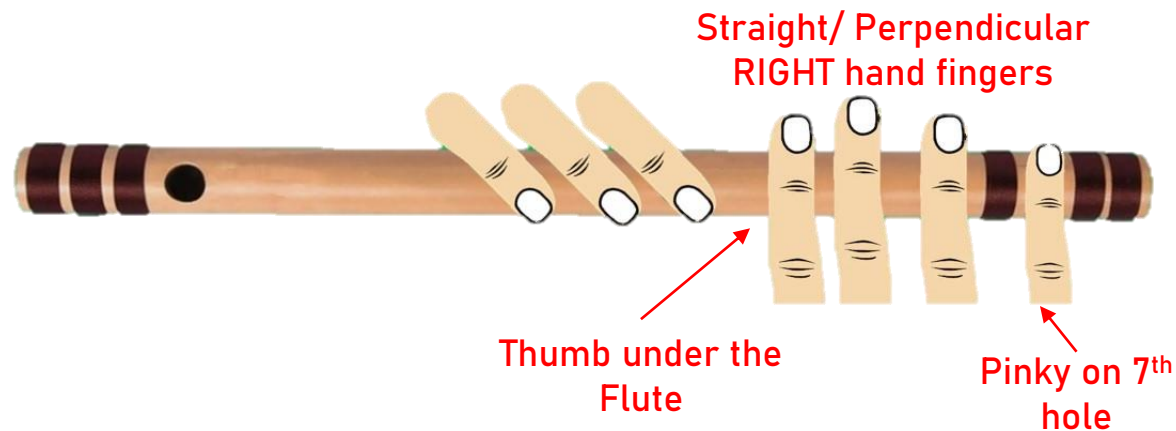
## LEFT HAND holding

- Traditionally, the LEFT hand fingers will be kept inclined, making a point of contact/ support between the index finger and the flute. This type of holding makes it easier to play gamakams and higher speeds
- The Thumb will be under the Flute, as a support



## RIGHT HAND holding

- Close the 7<sup>th</sup> hole with the Pinky / Little Finger. On a 6 hole flute, just keep it right after the 6<sup>th</sup> hole
- Then, just place the other fingers on the flute straight (perpendicular to the flute/ not inclined)
- Thumb will be under the Flute, as a support
- Don't try to align and close the holes with finger tips. This is cause stress in fingers and will not work well. The RIGHT HAND holes are closed with/ closer to the middle section of fingers

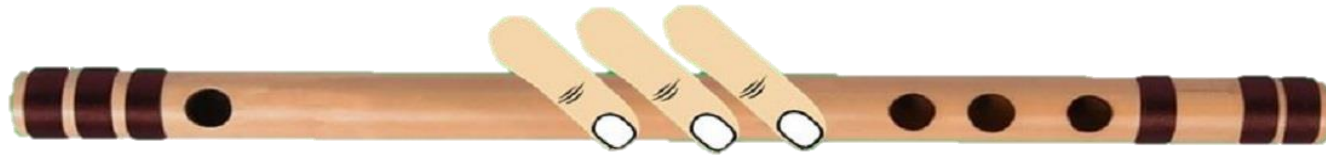


Classic holding by  
Maha Guru Dr. N. Ramani Sir

## Another Left Hand Note – “N”

### Note “N”

- Blow in to the flute with the first **THREE** holes CLOSED
- This is the note “N” (**Ni** in the “Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni” scheme)
- Play and hold this note as long as you can.
- Keeping the finger inclined as in the picture, is advised



Note n / N  
(3 holes CLOSED)

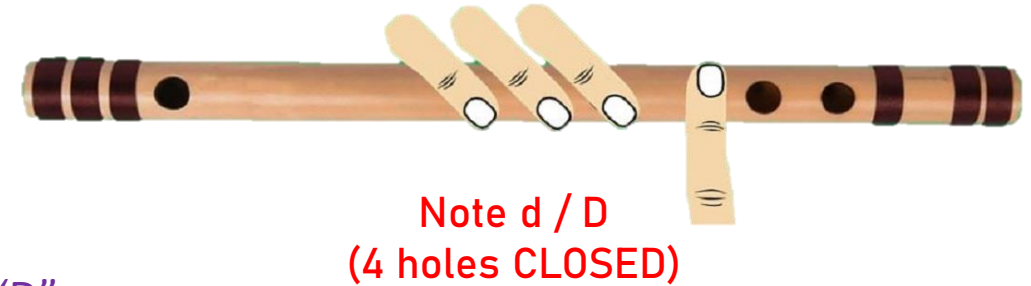
### Points to remember

- With 3 holes closed, you will hear a sound **Lower** in frequency than “S”. This is the lower frequency Ni, written as **Ṇ** (dot below) or **n** (lower case)
- Try blowing a little harder/ faster (with 3 holes closed), and you will hear a higher frequency sound (next Octave) for the same fingering. This is the **HIGH Ni** note, written as **N**
- Try playing Low (n) and High (N) notes one after the other
- Play Long, Sustained notes

## Right Hand Notes - Dha & Pa

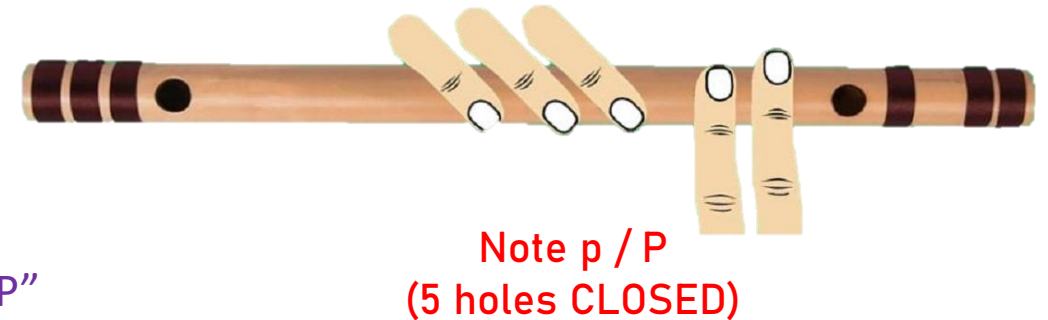
### Note "D"

- Blow in to the flute with the first **FOUR** holes CLOSED
- This is "**D**" (**Dha** in the "Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni" scheme)
- Play and hold this note as long as you can.
- As mentioned earlier,
  - Blowing **SOFTER** will produce the LOW "Dha" note - d
  - Blowing **HARDER** will produce the HIGH "Dha" note – "D"

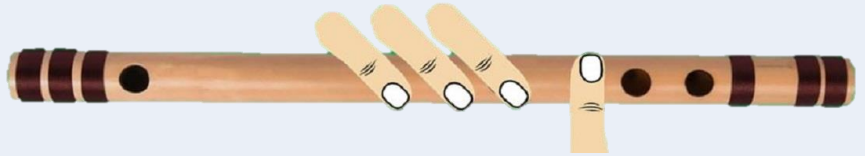
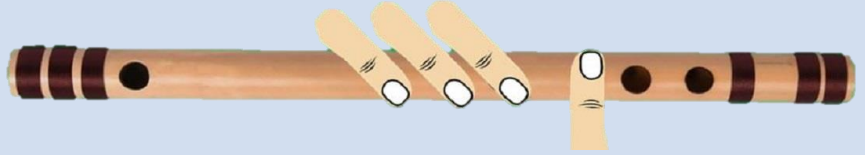
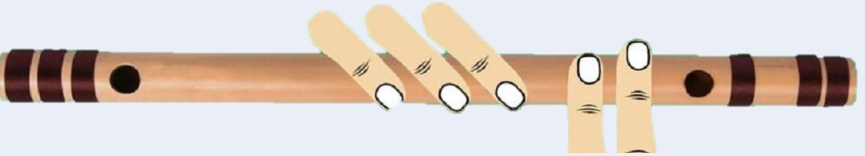
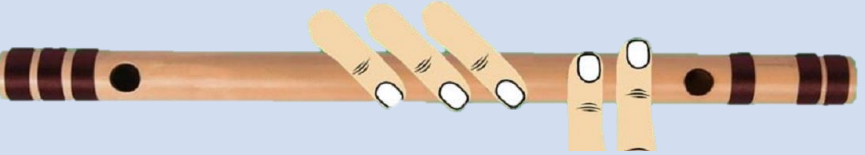


### Note "P"

- Blow in to the flute with the first **FIVE** holes CLOSED
- This is "**P**" (**Pa** in the "Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni" scheme)
- Play and hold this note as long as you can.
- As mentioned earlier,
  - Blowing **SOFTER** will produce the LOW "Pa" note - p
  - Blowing **HARDER** will produce the HIGH "Pa" note – "P"



# Play the Notes N, D & P

|                                       |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>n , , ,<br/>(blow <b>Soft</b>)</p> |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close all holes tightly.</li> <li>• Blow <b>SOFT</b> to produce the note “n”</li> </ul> |
| <p>N , , ,<br/>(blow <b>Hard</b>)</p> |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close all holes tightly.</li> <li>• Blow <b>HARD</b> to produce the note “N”</li> </ul> |
| <p>d , , ,<br/>(blow <b>Soft</b>)</p> |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close all holes tightly.</li> <li>• Blow <b>SOFT</b> to produce the note “d”</li> </ul> |
| <p>D , , ,<br/>(blow <b>Hard</b>)</p> |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close all holes tightly.</li> <li>• Blow <b>HARD</b> to produce the note “D”</li> </ul> |
| <p>p , , ,<br/>(blow <b>Soft</b>)</p> |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close all holes tightly.</li> <li>• Blow <b>SOFT</b> to produce the note “p”</li> </ul> |
| <p>P , , ,<br/>(blow <b>Hard</b>)</p> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close all holes tightly.</li> <li>• Blow <b>HARD</b> to produce the note “P”</li> </ul> |

# Tips for Easy blowing and Good Note Quality

## Tips for Good Blowing

- Sit **Straight**, Look **Straight** and Blow **Downward**
- Stretch your lips as you would say the letter "P". Do not make a round shape (O) with your lips
- Keep your cheeks flat, we won't blow using our whole mouth
- Blow using only your lips in a smooth, NARROW air stream. Blow as if you would say "Pooh"

## Tips for Good Note Quality

- Close the holes first, and then blow (closing and blowing should not be done together, as closing might come later affecting sound production)
- Focus on Closing the LEFT hand holes tightly while playing any note
- Take fresh air and blow individually for each note (Breathe IN, breathe OUT to the Flute)
- Feel the edge/ rim of holes on all closed fingers
- Feel the vibration of air/ flute on all closed fingers
- Play LONG Notes
- Keep Sruthi ON (Sruthi E for a 3/ E Flute) while playing which will give a good support to playing better

## More Exercises with N, D & P

| NOTATION            | Remarks (Play each note 4 seconds long) |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| S,,, n,,,           | • <b>LOW</b> notes S & n                |
| Š,,, N,,,           | • <b>HIGH</b> notes Š & N               |
| S,,, n,,, d,,,      | • <b>LOW</b> notes S, n & d             |
| Š,,, N,,, D,,,      | • <b>HIGH</b> notes Š, N & D            |
| S,,, n,,, d,,, p,,, | • <b>LOW</b> notes S, n & d             |
| Š,,, N,,, D,,, P,,, | • <b>HIGH</b> notes Š, N, D & P         |
| P,,, D,,, N,,, Š,,, | • <b>HIGH</b> notes P, D, N & Š         |
| p,,, d,,, n,,, S,,, | • <b>LOW</b> notes p, d, n & S          |

# Your First Song on the Flute

## Hot Cross Buns

- Play the note in each column for 1 second
- If you see a comma, hold the previous note for one more second – For example, S , (total 2 seconds)
- When you see two notes together, each note takes half a second. For example SS takes total 1 second

Hot Cross Buns

|    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|
| G  | R  | S  | ,  |
| G  | R  | S  | ,  |
| SS | SS | RR | RR |
| G  | R  | S  | ,  |

Hot Cross Buns

One a penny, Two a penny

Hot Cross Buns

# Another Song – Mary had a Little Lamb

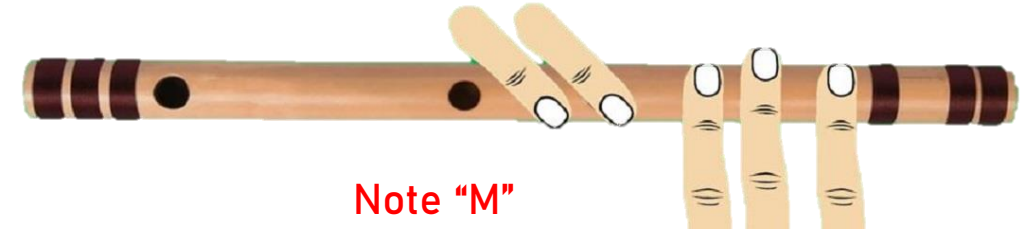
## Mary Had a Little Lamb

- Play the note in each column for 1 second
- If you see a comma, hold the previous note for one more second
- “P” is the **High** note “Pa”
- S , , , Play “S” and hold it for 3 more seconds

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| G | R | S | R | G | G | G | , |
| R | R | R | , | G | P | P | , |
| G | R | S | R | G | G | G | G |
| R | R | G | R | S | , | , | , |

## Note “Ma”

- Close ALL holes EXCEPT the FIRST one and blow. This is the note “M” (“Ma” in the “Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni” scheme)
  - On a 8 hole Carnatic flute, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (last) holes will be **OPEN**
  - The 7<sup>th</sup> (Pinky) hole will be **CLOSED**
- This is the HIGH “M”. LOW “m” fingering is different which will be discussed at a later stage of learning



Note “M”

Now, play the following exercises

|    |                                         |
|----|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. | P , , ,                                 |
| 2. | P , , , M , , ,                         |
| 3. | P , , , M , , , G , , ,                 |
| 4. | P , , , M , , , G , , , R , , ,         |
| 5. | P , , , M , , , G , , , R , , , S , , , |

|    |                         |
|----|-------------------------|
| 6. | G , , ,                 |
| 7. | G , , , M , , ,         |
| 8. | G , , , M , , , P , , , |

|     |                                         |
|-----|-----------------------------------------|
| 9.  | S , , ,                                 |
| 10. | S , , , R , , ,                         |
| 11. | S , , , R , , , G , , ,                 |
| 12. | S , , , R , , , G , , , M , , ,         |
| 13. | S , , , R , , , G , , , M , , , P , , , |

|     |                                 |
|-----|---------------------------------|
| 14. | S , R , G , M , P , D , N , Ś , |
| 15. | Ś , N , D , P , M , G , R , S , |

# Your First Song including “M”

## Twinkle Twinkle Little Star

- Play the note in each column for 1 second
- If you see a comma, hold the previous note for one more second
- “P” is the **High** note “Pa”

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | S | P | P | D | D | P | , |
| M | M | G | G | R | R | S | , |
| P | P | M | M | G | G | R | , |
| P | P | M | M | G | G | R | , |
| S | S | P | P | D | D | P | , |
| M | M | G | G | R | R | S | , |

# Congratulations !!

Now, you are ready to START  
The Exciting journey of  
Learning Carnatic Flute