

CHANGING PERSPECTIVE IN THE TEACHING METHODOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF PROF. V. BALAJI AT THE FACULTY OF PERFORMING ARTS, BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This article examines the changing perspective in the teaching methodology in an institutional frame, taking the case study of Prof. V. Balaji. A special attention will be given on how the emergence of technological progress influenced the way of teaching and questions a redefinition of the teacher-student relation or Guru-Shishya Parampara tradition inside an institution. In the last two decades, the rapid development of technology and emergence of predominant culture of social media has irreversibly modified the way to relate to each other in the society. In this particular context, the phenomenon of social media, streaming platform and accessible audio-video recording devices have as well acted as an accelerator to the metamorphosis of the teacher-student relation in the class, an era where the guru is one click away. Taking in consideration these new elements that induce to define a new era in the teacher-student relation, this article will prospect the challenges faced by Prof. V. Balaji.

Key words: Teaching Methodology, Guru-Shishya, Hindustani, Music, Institution

INTRODUCTION

The new and rapid emergence of new technologies in recent years has changed the ways of doing, learning and questioning traditional teachings in the Indian Classical Musical sphere, both in institutional and private terms. The classical music in India, whose history dates back to the time of the Vedas, where devotional rites were accompanied by hymns to sing "Samavedas", has undergone an overhaul in its system of transmission of knowledge during different periods of its history. The "technological" revolution that is currently going through is therefore, nothing new for a tradition that has known how to renew and adapt itself and evolve constantly. By incorporating and immersing itself in socio-cultural contexts, the culture policy has been carried out ateachage behaving like a real living organism, like a cell with a permeable membrane that draws in what it needs from its environment but by filtering whatever do not suit. Because of this similarity, the identity of Indian music can be compared to a biological organism surviving in organize manner, resulting from multiple variations over time as clearly stated, "*All biological organisms, in all their*

diversity and richness of forms and kinds, meet two general out exceptions: they are organized and their organization undergoes variation.”

EMERGENCE OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC IN INSTITUTION

Artistic and cultural practices have been present in the curricula of Indian universities since the middle of the 20th century. Among various educational cultural practices, music occupies special place in India. In addition to its age, as a specific discipline, it's more institutionalized than any other cultural practice because of its historical status and appeal, as the fruit of a rich history existing in the heart of the society. Music has been the subject of a scholarly approach and is present at all times in ritual and ordinary practices. At the end of the 19th century, by crucial influence of two musicologists, Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, Hindustani classical music emancipated itself from a circle reserved until then only to illustrious masters, their lineage and to selected students and made it accessible through the creation of Music Schools and Institutions open to all student swilling to study Indian classical Music. This allowed a rapid popularization of Indian classical music in all spheres and opened the doors to a larger audience.

Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, a brilliant musicologist and the writer of the first modern treatise on Hindustani classical music was one of the first architects of musical education propagation through the development of a precise curriculum and syllabus. His first music school, Madhav Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in Gwalior witnessed the emergence of the first syllabus for music students which later on acted as a model in music schools and universities affiliated by the central government as performing arts faculties, one of the most recognized of which was established under the roof of Banaras Hindu University in the year 1950. In this article, we will discover how the senior professor of violin of the faculty since 1993, Prof. V. Balaji, belonging to the V.K.V. Parampara tradition and with expert skills and knowledge in Hindustani and Karnatik Music, has established the guru-shishya parampara tradition inside his classroom to the utmost benefit of his students and how he utilizes new technologies to provide more efficient learning process.

GURU-SHISHYA PARAMPARA IN CLASSROOM

The notion of “guru” in India is one of the pillars of its culture and guardian of the treasure from the past. It is through the importance given to a particular individual, the guru, the bearer of wisdom and knowledge that the conservation of India’s cultural heritage has been possible. The term ‘guru’, takes its roots from Sanskrit language, old Indo-Aryan and sacred language of Hinduism in which the most ancient documents as the Vedas has been composed. The word is made out of 2 syllables: “gu” meaning ignorance and “ru” dispeller. It gives as a principal significance, the one that dispels the ignorance. In ancient times, guru had a central role in diffusing Vedic knowledge to *Shishya* (student) which later became the one incarnating a model to follow, an example and a source of inspiration in religious education mainly but in art oriented activities such music, dance, painting etc. as well.

The system of learning and assimilation of traditional Indian music, "guru-Shishya parampara" which appeared in conjunction with the appearance of the Vedas, presents an indivisible and immutable core, a sine qua non of its existence: orality. Indeed, we can assume that the longevity of such an ancient tradition maybe the consequence of an intergenerational transmission that favored a socio-interactional dimension of spoken language, putting written theories in the background. The oral transmission of knowledge can also explain the reasons for its modularity, not being subject to any theoretical constraint imprisoning it in past, the freedom of interpretation of the structure and addition of new grammatical rules according to time has been facilitated.

In India, guru-Shishya tradition is a part of a long cultural tradition. Even today, the guru-shishya relationship didn’t lose anything from its past and continue to be highly valued, highly respected both in individual and institutional terms. The tradition, by its English translation which would be equivalent to “teacher-student relationship” holds its importance within the classroom of any performing arts faculty in India, where teacher is considered by students not only as a “teacher”, but also as “guru” at times.

Prof. V. Balaji acts as a perfect example of a teacher who has successfully established not only a teacher-student relationship, rather a relationship which has lots of similarities with guru-Shishya parampara tradition (the distinction

between “guru” and “teacher” appears at the point that “guru” holds an implication of deeper dedication and involvement) in which each student in the classroom gets the same amount of attention regarding their level and skills. The unicity of Prof. V. Balaji's classes stands in his attitude that makes his musical knowledge accessible to all students essentially through his instrument of predilection, namely the violin, besides by use of his voice. Realizing the challenge of addressing to all kinds of student abilities, he follows an instinctive pedagogical process divided in several steps, if necessary with by the support of his voice, to emulate different student expectations:

- Providing a warm up by series of simple alankaras at low speed
- Increasing the speed gradually while keeping eye on students playing those exercises
- Identifying students facing difficulties when speed is increased and encouraging, motivating them to keep playing despite possible out of tune condition.
- Providing a high speed performance which his students unable to play instantly, so setting a goal for them.

The teaching approach of Prof. V. Balaji bears a core that is immutable over time and creates an atmosphere of music happening where raga always at the center of attention.

Moreover, Prof. V. Balaji is a violin teacher who has implemented technological methods in his teaching not only as a support to facilitate his teaching but also in a manner to serve the parampara tradition in his classes which he explains:

“Students nowadays coming into musical education are evolving in a world where computers, smart phones, music players and internet are a part of daily life. They are born in a century where all these technologies don't have any secrets for most of them. I can see how music is present and easily accessible in all these media and how, if used in a correct way, becomes a mediator to stimulate in them further interest, a continuation of teaching happening in the classroom.”

USE OF WHATSAPP MOBILE MESSAGING APPLICATION: ITS BENEFITS AND EDUCATIONAL USES

Instant messaging applications are nowadays among the most popular of all. The most popular messaging service, WhatsApp is used by several billions of people, almost half of the world's population. This application is generally used for communication and for sharing information but it has appeared possible that its features can provide a useful support to the students. In September 2018, Prof. V. Balaji noticed the enthusiasm of the new generation of students towards their mobile phones and the possibility of using this tool as a new pedagogical tool. He initiated an experience never attempted in the faculty of performing arts before by creating a Whatsapp group called "VKV Parampara" considering the benefits it can bring if smartly integrated and supervised.

The main objectives of this group have been very clearly and precisely defined by him to the concern of all students:

- The content of the publications should be exclusively related to Indian classical music and music in general.
- The students should not use the group for personal communication.
- The question addressed by the students to Prof. V. Balaji should be related to music only.
- The students who have the desire to deepen their knowledge in one specific raga should address their requests to Prof. V. Balaji through the Whatsapp group.
- The audio recordings shared by Prof. V. Balaji in the group listened carefully by the students and questions should be raised by them to clarify any misunderstanding in the aesthetical concept of the raga performed.

The creation of the group created a fruitful and stimulant atmosphere, the implication and the will of Prof. V. Balaji to transmit his knowledge has created a classroom inside the classroom accessible any time of the day giving a sound support to the dedicated students involved in the art of playing the violin.

The benefits in the long term has been multiple such as easy communication in an instant, liftment of the distance between students and teacher, possibility of creation of audio lessons which can be sent directly and easily to all the students present in the group, sharing exercises or homework with students even when they are not in class, direct sharing of educational audio visual resources. This support has provided the students with the opportunity to keep practicing during the days when they remained far from the school due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

YOUTUBE AS A NEW EDUCATIONAL PLATFORM INTEGRATED DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

YouTube is an American website and a social media for hosting and distributing videos created in February and launched in May 2005 by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley and Jawed Karim and then sold to Google in October 2006. This social media allows users to watch, post, share, comment and rate videos posted by “youtubers”. In addition, this site supports streaming and live videos. YouTube is available at www.youtube.com in over 100 countries around the world and in 80 different languages. It might be used for multiple purposes one of which is to make educational videos. It is possible to share the videos one by one to the students, but it seems even more relevant to create your own channel that the students can consult any time. The development of social media in terms of propagation, handling and sharing of information and documents has given them an important position especially with the large number of learners and teachers who use them on daily basis. Although the idea of harnessing these media to manage learning has not been institutionalized, it is currently finding its own place among teachers who master them. These new environments allow teacher to publish or share videos, images, articles, etc., giving the link to his learners so that they can consult them and react by comments or discussions on at any time.

During the lockdown, Prof. V. Balaji has made of this opportunity to use as an educational tool to share all the ragas prescribed in the syllabus common to the students of bachelor and master levels in violin in his channel. There he has followed a traditional approach of presenting those ragas. Taking the example of Raga Bhimpalasi, an afternoon Raga, he has divided his video recording in three parts:

- He starts with an introductory alaap, showing the essence and important phrases from mandrasaptak towards tar saptak.
- He presents a slow composition embellished with subtle nuances.
- He completes his lessons with a fast composition in drut teental, to which he incorporated taans inspired from the Gayaki Ang, from small to large taans.

During a time where physical classes were not taking place, Prof. V. Balaji's aim was to nourish the student's motivation and encourage them to keep practicing despite the situation where students were isolated from their teachers and musical environment of the performing arts faculty. On this attempt of his, Prof. V. Balaji said :

“In the field of learning, it is a fact that motivation plays an important and central role which determines the ability of students to improve his playing, to increase their potential capacity and absorb the essence of the ragas naturally. The desire for musical knowledge and the process of listening is indeed a multifaceted, biological, psychic and a cultural process: it leads the learner to make sense of what he is learning, which in turn increases his motivation. To keep their motivation intact, posting videos on YouTube appeared as a logical solution, away to create a class with a tool accessible by all nowadays.”

The goal of Prof. V. Balaji has been to move from teacher-centered class model to the student-centered in order to meet individual needs. Based on this philosophy, teacher gives student access to resources (their channel or another YouTube channel) and when necessary, assists them to develop skills or answer their questions through WhatsApp group.

CONCLUSION

Today, musical education through institutions and music school became popular due to a demand and interest which has not decreased within time. To follow musical course parallel to other main study has also become possible with the establishment of part time courses. On the other hand, classical music education has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades with the

advent of the internet and advances in technology for recording and listening to music. While the syllabus has remained virtually unchanged, the transmission of musical and theoretical knowledge from teacher to student has drastically changed. The written medium, until then, the pupil's only reference point in order to be able to work on his compositions independent of his teacher, has gradually been accompanied by the possibility of recording lessons particularly with cell phones. Audio recordings but also videos have become an essential support for learning and auditory support for student practice. Teachers had to adjust to this new situation very different from their own learning which was mainly done through their gurus and the time spent with them. It is interesting to notice that the traditional guru-Shishya parampara tradition which used to be associated with the relation between a disciple and his master belonging to a certain gharana has become a model applicable in the classroom overtime.

Nevertheless, there are a few goals to keep in mind when using the audio-video recording for educational purposes. The first one is to keep the proper transmission of knowledge from teacher to student with a clear and understandable dialogue according to the level of the students as the main goal. The second objective is the mastery issue which involves listening activities. Since listening is a very important aspect of musical education, it shouldn't be underestimated, thus, teachers should motivate and train students to listen to valuable artists. The audio-video recordings should therefore no longer be considered as a simple learning aid or just as an illustration means, as it has too often been. It is therefore, necessary to propose situations which will pose recording as an object of analysis wherever possible, in written work, object of structuring, observation, evaluation, construction of meaning, therefore, of understanding. To sum up, new facilities offered with the technological progress have installed a new way to communicate with students. The experiment Prof. V. Balaji started in his classroom at the Faculty of Performing Arts of Banaras Hindu University has shown how it has been beneficial for all his students who are enthusiastic to deepen their knowledge and technical aspects related to their instruments.

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