

FORMING ADVANCED PRACTICE EXERCISES IN CARNATIC CLASSICAL MUSIC

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Abstract

The article aims at analysing a few aspects related to forming own exercises at advanced level and successfully implementing them in the practice sessions, limited to Carnatic classical music. and occasional reference is given to other genre for the better understanding of a few concepts. Music has many folds in order to get to know each aspect the practitioner is expected to spend quite a good amount of time and energy with hard work and dedication. Concentration is the key to success as many concepts demand keen observation and subtle nuances makes it inevitable to practice repeatedly until it is familiarised and stored in to muscle memory. Books can guide to see the wonders and practice can take to the actual wonderland of music. By practicing the above exercises and its variants with complete dedication and at most concentration would positively help him/her to reach the perfection in the aspect they choose in music.

Key words: Advanced Practice Exercises, Carnatic Classical Music

Music practice is a continuous process to become one with 'nada or musical sound. Teaching and learning music involve many steps. The very first is teaching followed by its analysis by the student while practicing then the preparation for presentation. Practice involves listening, repetition, internalising and expression through voice or instrument. Between the input in the form of teaching up to the output in the form of final presentation or performance practice has its impact on all the abovementioned steps. The focus of the article would be on practice at the advanced level in carnatic classical music.

SCOPE

The article aims at analysing a few aspects related to forming own exercises at advanced level and successfully implementing them in the practice sessions. The article is limited to carnatic classical music and occasional reference is given to other genre for the better understanding of a few concepts. The article is common to both instrumental and vocal music with some exceptions. Hence, application of the ideas mentioned here are subject to the clear understanding of the concept by the practitioner.

OBJECTIVES

The main idea of the article is to encourage and enable the students undergoing training at intermediate level and advanced level in carnatic classical music to form their own exercises which are expected to help them in developing creativity and thinking out of the box pertaining to music.

- Enabling practitioners to draw inspirations from various sources to form ideas.
- Providing practically viable examples and a few ideas to form own exercises.
- Encouraging to prepare for performances with open mind to receive the best from across genre to form own ideas.

LIMITATIONS

The article is aimed at bringing out brief guidelines which can be further developed to form concrete ideas and a few concepts to improve the overall perception of music. The article doesn't include any single idea or thought based on a particular school or version of a composition. The article is suggestive and doesn't include any specific parameters which could be applicable to individual or school. The idea or concepts presented here are experimental in nature and the end result is entirely dependent on its implementation under the able guidance of teacher. The article is aimed at intermediate and advanced level students hence the preparation related to basic exercises are not covered in this article.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is it possible to make music practice interesting for a practitioner?
- How to draw inspiration from various sources to form creative ideas in music?
- Is music practice generic or common in nature?

Practice is a routine followed while learning music and continued for a longer duration. It may be continued throughout the musical journey. One of the very common questions could be how it would be to listen to the practice session of a music exponent?

The answer could be as simple as nice, as complex as cannot predict. The reason could be that, the idea of listening to practice might sound interesting session but comparing it with the performance would change the very perception about the music that we hear in practice. Sometime the music that a musician sing or play may not have anything to do with his performance as it would be his/her preparation of skillset for the following performances. Practice does not necessarily include songs or melodies. It could be as simple as repeating the musical phrase until perfection to repeating the entire composition for infinite number of times to attain excellence in the parameters desired by the musician. The very idea of practice might differ for each person as their ideas might not be common but music is. However, there are a few set practice techniques which are common and have been practiced from many centuries which are not included in this article as they come under basic practice.

BASIC PRACTICE

The practice which includes pitch perfection at swara level, rhythm perfection at singing or playing the basic patterns such as 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 and so on and trying to interpret them with swaras as simple patterns. Basic practice does not indicate how long a student has learnt music or how many compositions he/she might have learnt etc. It indicates the stage of musical experience of a practitioner. It represents the overall appeal of the music with minimal difference to both common man and people who are less oriented to music and the exponent who is considered proficient in subject. Questioning about what is proficiency would move away the focus of the article so it would be appropriate to delve deep in to the idea of forming exercises.

INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED LEVEL IN MUSIC

The intermediate or advanced level can be interpreted as being able to construct music from given notation with less deviation from present concert version of that particular composition in case of general presentation. This can be called intermediate level. Advanced level could be a musician in the making who can re-construct music through notations, recordings of any quality, along with his/her experience as learner from guru. Along with re-construction forming own sangatis within the limit of grammar of that particular genre of music is appreciable. Note: adding sangati-s does not mean creating entirely new phrase or musically rephrasing the composition or any such modifications. It can be

understood as adding contemporary phrases within the limits of the structure and grammar of the composition. The main objective should be emphasizing the idea of original composer. Apart from the above aspects advanced level also include familiarity with the concepts and syntax of improvisation. Once the student reaches this level regardless of the certification/accreditation he/she can venture forming new exercises taking at most care of voice/playing technique, grammar of music, originality of the composition and so on.

FORMING EXERCISES

We are hearing, singing and playing swaras and related basic exercises from very long. Is there a requirement to form own exercises? Are not the exercises in vogue sufficient to build the qualitative elements in a student and make him/her a musician? Are we going to generalise the exercises that we form and thereby confuse the students of next generation about the authenticity of exercises? The answer would be simple. It is essential to form own ideas in the form of exercises. The ideas are not necessarily forced on any practitioner as they will be having their own approach to make their presentation better. The important idea here is to encourage students of music to think in different angle and come up with own ideas which can be written down in their notes and then published when they feel it is worth and it would help others.

Starting with the basic exercises and forming ideas out of them could be viable approach as it might lead to many new possibilities and also forming new exercises in other categories.

FORMING EXERCISES WITH SARALE AND SWARAVALI-S

The first lesson in music is sarale which is taught in raga Mayamalavagoula. These exercises can also be sung or played in other melakarta ragas e.g. Changing the swaras from Nishada would result in Vakulabharana. Changing other swaras would derive at Gayakapriya, Suryakanta, Hatakambari, Kamavardhini, Dhenuka, Ganamoorthi. Changing the kakalinishada to kaishiki would result in another melakarta raga vakulabharana and so on.

This approach can be followed for jantivarase, datuvarase, alankara-s and other swara exercises. Depending on the skill set of practitioners, this can also be followed for geetas jatiswaras and the like.

Varna is a musical form with endless possibilities. This musical form can be a great platform to perfect both melody and rhythm. As the varnas are composed in various raga-s and tala-s this can be easily interchanged to obtain perfection in many aspects. The earlier mentioned exercise of changing the swaravariant would help in familiarising many ragas which may or may not be found in core carnatic classical music e.g. Changing the daivata of mohanaragavarna 'ninnukori into shuddhadaivata would help in familiarizing vasanti another melodious raga which is not found in core musical forms other than devotional music. Similarly, changing the nishada of hamsadhwani into kaishikinishada would help familiarising another uncommon raga called veenavadini. The varnas 'jalajaksha' and 'pagavari' can be taken for this experimentation as they are commonly taught compositions.

CHROMATIC EXERCISES

Singing 12 swaras has mixed reactions between musicians. Some musicians opine that the chromatic exercises help instrumentalists and have less significance for vocal practitioners. If the idea of singing or playing chromatic exercises is to attain pitch perfection then it is absolutely essential for both vocal and instrumental practitioners.

What is chromatic? Presenting 12 note positions (swarasthaanas) in order with omission of repeated or redundant notes can be called as chromatic scale which is in vogue in Western classical music and related genres. Adapting this scale to carnatic classical music without changing the swara names would greatly benefit aspirants of carnatic classical music. To practice these exercises singing or playing shuddha swaras or straight notes without gamakas is highly recommended. Shruti alignment is the key focus here.eg:

|| sa ri₁ ri₂ ga₂|ga₃ ma₁ | ma₂ pa||

|| da₁ da₂ ni₂ | sa., | ; ||

The following table lists the swaras with the parallel names in Hindustani and western classical music assuming the "C" as adhara shadja in carnatic, Hindustani and tonik in western classical music.

SN	Carnatic classical	Hindustani classical	Western classical
01	Shadja	Shadaj	Tonik
02	Shuddha Rishaba	Komal Rishabh	D _b
03	Chaturshruti Rishaba	Shuddh Rishabh	D
04	Saadhaarana Gaandhaara	Shuddh Gaandhaar	E _b
05	Antara Gaandhaara	Shuddh Gaandhaar	E
06	Shuddha Madhyama	Komal/shuddh Madhyam	F
07	Prati Madhyama	Teevra Madhyam	F [#] /G _b
08	Panchama	Pancham	G
09	Shuddha Daivata	Komal Daivat	A _b
10	Chaturshruti Daivata	Shuddh Daivat	A
11	Kaishiki Nishaada	Komal Nishaad	B _b /A [#]
12	Kaakali Nishaada	Shuddh Nishaad	B

These are rebasic reference to swara-s in various genres. There are many subtle details as to how and why a particular swara is called so in that genre and the like.

In the above exercise the simple pattern in aditala would suffice to maintain laya and the pitch perfection can be focused with ease without pondering about laya as it would be a familiar tala from the beginning of music training.

OTHER CHROMATIC EXERCISES

Practicing chromatic notes has its own possibilities while learning music. After spending considerable time in core carnatic classical raga-s one can definitely practice chromatic notes to improve clarity and lucidity in presenting gamaka. Other exercises that can be sung in chromatic are: Sarale, jantivarase, datuvarase, upper and lower sthayi exercises, alankara-s, own exercises which are in line with the traditional pattern. Own exercises which are experimental in nature e.g. Alankara in any tala can be sung in chromatic scale. Datuvarase can also be presented in chromatic scale. This could improve both clarity and eventually speed and thus building confidence in practitioner to take up challenging tasks related to music especially improvisation oriented.

RHYTHMIC EXERCISES

Forming rhythmic exercises needs extra effort compared to melody as it deals with number that adheres to aesthetics of carnatic classical music. Interchanging

the tala, nade and exercises related to tempo are some significant practices which could help considerably improve laya orientation.

INTERCHANGING TALA

Each composition is set to a specific tala which is undoubtedly the best rhythmic frame work done by the composer. However, for practice it can be interchanged to assess laya orientation e.g. a varna set to aditala can be experimentally presented in other tala with same number of akshara/matras like khandajhampe, trishramathya, rupakatala with divyasankeernalaghu and so on. In this exercise the practitioner can retain original eduppu or graha of composition or change in order to resolve the conflict related to ghata and the e

INTERCHANGING THE NADE

Every composition is set to a particular nade of tala which suits the composition both musically and lyrically. But this can be temporarily changed during the practice session to get a clear picture of nade and its application to music and lyrics e.g. a Varna composed in atatala-chaturashranade can also be sung in mishranadetrishratriputatala. A varna set to aditala-chaturashranade can be presented in dvinade as the first half of aditala in trishranade and the second half in khandanade or vice versa. Overdoing the above exercise might drain the energy for the day hence, it is appropriate to try the simple exercises first and venture the complex rhythmic structures once the practitioner is familiar with the concept.

AVADHANATALA

Avadhanatala is counting two or more different tala-s with both hands while the tala should be different on different hands and the counting has to be visible. This exercise requires advanced rhythmic skill set. To start with simple talas e.g. counting aditala (chaturashratriputa) in right hand and rupakatala (either version of rupaka; 2+4 or 1+2) could be the great start. Adding more variety to this in the form of nade, kale, tempo could make it more interesting. The art of avadhana or simultaneously doing two or more tasks is in vogue in Indian culture from very long. Ashtavadhana and shatavadhana are a few examples to quote.

PALLAVI

The musical form of highest order pallavi also known as raga-tana-pallavi provides an excellent opportunity to form melody, words, rhythm, structure and any aspect that comes under improvisation. This musical form requires total dedication and preparation with the exercises including experimental or modification/adaptation to traditional practice greatly help in presenting pallavi with its full colour and feature. The end result of practice of exercises including own variants formed by the practitioner would immensely benefit the performer in presenting pallavi which is considered to be one of the testimonies for musicianship of an artist. Be it vocal or instrument the practice is the ultimate path which can be covered by investing time, effort, energy and most importantly full faith in music.

CONCLUSION

Music has many folds in order to get to know each aspect the practitioner is expected to spend quite a good amount of time and energy with hard work and dedication. Concentration is the key to success as many concepts demand keen observation and subtle nuances makes it inevitable to practice repeatedly until it is familiarised and stored in to muscle memory. Books can guide to see the wonders and practice can take to the actual wonderland of music. By practicing the above exercises and its variants with complete dedication and at most concentration would positively help him/her to reach the perfection in the aspect they choose in music.

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