

# A STUDY OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SARGAM GEET AND LAKSHAN GEET IN THE LEARNING PROCESS OF HINDUSTANI VOCAL MUSIC.

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## ABSTRACT

*“Geetam Vaadyam Tatha Nrityam, Sangeetamuchyate” meaning Sangeet is the culmination of vocal music, instrumental music and dance. Vocal music is one of the pillars of Indian classical music. Indian music is broadly divided into two main classical traditions – Hindustani or North Indian classical music and Carnatic or South Indian classical music. Hindustani classical vocal music being one of the main branches under the Hindustani system, is deeply embedded in our Indian culture. From the traditional Gurukul system of music learning to present times, aspiring vocalists have been trained adopting various teaching methods. Central to mastering the art of Hindustani classical vocal music, lies the foundational training. Foundational learning is the pillar that upholds and strengthens the entire learning process. Sargam Geets and Lakshan Geets are considered as the indispensable parts of the foundational learning process. They provide essential foundation for learning the advanced aspects of Hindustani classical vocal music. This article explores the significance of these elements in the process of learning Hindustani classical vocal music.*

**Keywords:** Sargam Geet, Lakshan Geet, Hindustani classical music.

## Introduction

Basically there are seven Swaras with twelve Swara Sthanas. The entire music world is dependent on these twelve Swara sthanas. Every composition is created with the help of these note positions. Foundational learning in Hindustani classical vocal music basically begins with the introduction and study of these seven Swaras and twelve Swara sthanas. These notes forms the basis for all the forms of music in Hindustani classical vocal music. Unlike instrumental music, the eyes play a minimal role in vocal music, as it is primarily about visualizing the notes and their relationships. This make the whole process of vocal music learning internal. The internal visualisation must be very strong in order to excel in vocal music. The ability to perform classical vocal music proficiently relies on both talent, which determines how well you sing and knowledge, which reflects how well you understand. Creativity forms the core of classical vocal music and this is one of the key aspects that sets it apart from light music, where the compositions are fixed. And these two forms of music namely Sargam Geet and Lakshan Geets serve as a bridge for developing and nurturing a sense of creativity. They are special in their own way. A Sargam Geet is a song of only notes in a Raag, set to a rhythmic pattern and Lakshan Geet is song which describes the features of the Raag. Therefore, every element, form of music in Hindustani classical music serves a distinct and possesses its own characteristic features.

Outcome of foundational learning: A single lifetime is not enough to fully comprehend classical music. As the saying goes “Happiness lies in pursuit not in the possession”, in the same way classical music is never truly possessed. It is an eternal and endless quest. It is this unending pursuit that fills the musician with immense joy. The first step towards this quest is the foundational learning. Few of the outcomes of foundational learning are listed out below.

- Swar Shudhata that is tonal and note accuracy.
- Ability to identify the notes with its correct position.
- Understand the grammar of the Raag, Chalan (movement) and important phrases of the Raags.
- Ability to understand, improvise and explore the Raags creatively.
- Emotional and aesthetic depth.
- Strong and flexible voice.
- Incorporating ornamentation such as khatka, murki, meend etc. in your singing.
- Achieve control over rhythm and Taal.

To achieve the above outcomes Alankaars, Sargam Geets and Lakshan Geets play a very special role. The emphasis during the phase of foundational learning is not on performance but on incorporating a strong sense of musical grammar and internal grasp

with discipline. Guru plays a pivotal role in this phase. The Guru, through individualised tailored lesson plans, helps students achieve musical progress. The student through Riyaz which is “The corruption of the Arabic word Riyajat, which means perseverance, study, effort and learning” [1] tries to attain musical excellence.

The process of learning begins with individual note practise (Swar Sadhana) and gradually progresses to practise of Alankaars or Paltas. Alankars or Paltas are the “Sequential arrangement of svaras in ascending and descending order” [2]. They are the sequential vocal exercises. These Paltas are helpful in understanding the note positions and their relationships. They are the structured, fixed patterns of Swaras which are intended to be practised repetitively to gain flexibility, strength and clarity in the voice. Normally only Paltas with shudha Swaras are taught to the students. Later same Alankaar patterns in other different scales involving vikrit Swaras are taught. Vikrit Swaras are “Swaras which are away from their original, natural, or shudha positions” [3].

## Sargam Geet

Sargam Geet or Swarmalika is a “Gita based on raga and composed with the help of sargam and tala” [4]. It is a composition of notes without lyrics set to a Raag and Taal. Sargam Geet is taught to the students to understand the melodic movement of the Raag. It is a short composition sung with the Swaras used in the given Raag. Sargam Geet purely focusses on the structure of the Raag. Sargam Geets are taught to the learners as an introduction of the Raag. Normally Sargam Geets are taught to the students after learning Alankaars or Paltas. As with other compositions in Hindustani classical music, Sargam Geet also consists of two parts, namely Sthayi and Antara. Sargam Geets highlights the vaadi and the samvaadi of the Raags. Unlike Bandish or Cheez, which contain poetic lyrics, Sargam Geets are more focussed on the note structures of the Raag. They portray the characteristic features of the Raag. With the help of the Sargam Geet the learner gains an understanding of the emotive essence of the Raag. Through Sargam Geets, the learner gets an understanding about the permissible main phrases which can be used in Raag exploration. Since Sargam Geets are composed in simple Taals, they help in building a strong foundation in rhythmic aspect of classical music learning. The sargam Geets are indispensable in the music learning process. Sargam Geets are generally composed in basic Raags; however, there also exist Sargam Geets set in intermediate and advanced Raags. Sargam Geets helps in establishing the notes of the Raag in their correct position. Sargam Geets are primarily intended for vocal performance. When rendered on instruments, it becomes Gat. Sargam Geets are written using a systematic notation system. Presently, there are two most popular notation system in Hindustan classical music, namely Bhatkhande notation system and Paluskar notation system. Notation writing with the help of a notation system helps student interpret and reproduce written music. Sargam Geets serve as foundational stepping stone for gaining an in-depth understanding of a Raag. The foremost role of a Sargam Geet is to familiarize students with the structure of the Raag. While explanation relating to details of the Raag like vaadi, samvaadi, pakkad etc. gives you a theoretical overview of the Raag, but it is the Sargam Geet which demonstrates these aspects in a practical way. Also Sargam Geets significantly contribute to the development of the voice culture, since these compositions demand clear pronunciation of the notes with precision in different patterns with steadiness in the voice. With this they develop control over the vocal chords. Also few Sargam Geets are demand singing long phrases without break, it helps students gain breath control which is of prime importance in the learning process of Hindustani classical vocal music. It improves the respiratory system of the student. Normally Sargam Geets are composed within a specific Raag. Sargam Geets act as bridge to learn more complex compositions in music like Lakshan Geet, Bandish, Tarana etc. For example when a student learns a Sargam Geet in Raag Yaman, it becomes easier to progress to a Bandish or other compositions in the same Raag, as the student is already familiar with its main and permissible melodic movements. Since aesthetics hold prime importance in Hindustani classical vocal music, Sargam Geets introduces students to the beauty of Raag music. It develops creativity by encouraging students to create more such compositions. The simplicity of the Sargam Geets allows teachers to use it as a tool to gauge and visualize a student’s potential for future progress. Because of this diagnostic value it is indispensable in the music learning curriculum. Therefore, Sargam Geet is a foundation for advanced learning.

## Lakshan Geet

Lakshan means ‘characteristics’ and Geet means song. Together it is called Lakshan Geet. Lakshan Geet is “A Composition which gives the salient features (lakshana) of a Raga, namely Thaata, svaras, vadi, samvadi, time of performance and son on” [5]. It is a song in a specific given Raag and set to a Taal, that highlights and describes the characteristic features of a Raag. Lakshan Geets facilitates a practical and enjoyable way to understand the rules of the Raag. It is like musical definition of a Raag set to a Taal. As with other compositions in Hindustani music, Lakshan Geets also consist of two parts, namely the sthayi and antara. Lakshan Geets are composed in the very Raag that they describe. These Lakshan Geets gives a strong theoretical understanding about the structure of the Raag. The details of the Raag are often difficult to remember, but when presented in the form of a song, such as Lakshan Geet, they become easier to recall. Since Lakshan Geets are composed using Hindi and Sanskrit words, they help enhance the vocabulary of the students learning them. By learning Lakshan Geets, students acquire not only the ability to sing a composition in a Raag but also an understanding of its essence and structural framework. It provides a strong foundation

for future learning. Lakshan Geets also have a historical relevance as few compositions are centuries old. Lakshan Geets are like musical story telling of the Raag structure. Since Lakshan Geets are composed in some Taals, it also helps students understand the rhythmic aspects. Lakshan Geets act as a bridge that helps students move forward to learn other compositions like Bandish, Tarana etc. and many more. Lakshan Geets serve a bridge between technical exercises and advanced compositions. Instead of teaching theory and then expecting students to apply it, Lakshan Geets are readymade compositions which lets the student learn Raag Lakshanas in a practical way. Lakshan Geets are like a combination of the theory and the practical aspects of the Raag. The lyrics in the Lakshan Geets are poetic in nature, thereby helping students build a strong vocabulary and develop a strong aesthetic sense. Just like children remember the nursery rhymes, when it is taught through a composition, instead of plain text, young learners of Hindustani classical vocal music can remember the characteristic features of the Raag when it is taught in a practical way. Since these compositions are crafted with such beauty, they naturally generates love for music. Through Lakshan Geets the students learn about the permissible combinations of Swaras as well as the restricted phrases that must be avoided. Both Sargam Geets and Lakshan Geets are considered essential parts of learning process. But Lakshan Geets stand apart because of the fact that, it not only trains the student with Swaras and rhythmic sense, but also provides theoretical insight of the Raag. The Lakshan Geets cultivate in students a habit of discipline by developing an ability to adhere to the rules of the Raag.

## Conclusion

Among the many elements in the Hindustani classical vocal learning process, Alankaars, Sargam Geet, Lakhsna Geets hold a special place. Apart from being tools for preparatory training, they also guide the learner towards mastery of Swaras, rhythm and the essence of the Raag at an advanced level. In classical vocal music, having a strong foundational learning is of prime importance. These elements of music learning are indispensable in a learner's musical journey. While Alankaars strengthen the visualisation of the notes with precision, Sargam Geets and Lakshan Geets roots the Swaras firmly with the framework of the Raag. Lakshan Geets becomes unique as this compositions links theory and practical. It provides the learner essential ear training which is considered a vital part of the learning process in vocal music. Together these forms of music prepare a student for advanced learning. They instil discipline, nurture creativity, and develop a strong sense of respect for the grammar of the Raag. Without these elements, higher stages of Hindustani classical vocal learning like Khyal, Dhrupad, Tarana etc. becomes difficult to understand. These act as a bridge for advanced learning. Therefore, they are not optional components but indispensable stepping stones, in a music learner's vocal music journey.

At Present, the Sargam Geets and Lakshan Geets are rarely performed in public concerts. They have remained largely as a part of academic syllabus in music schools and universities. It is the collective responsibility of music students and music professionals to bring these forms of music forward and present them on public platforms.

## References

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