

THE EVOLUTION IN MUSIC EDUCATION: FROM GURU-SHISHYA PARAMPARA TO MODERN PEDAGOGIES IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the significance and unique features of the conventional Guru-Shishya Parampara while also analysing the impact of modern teaching methods, including institutional education, online music classes, and technological tools. The objective of the study is to understand how modern teaching methods and digital technologies have influenced the quality of music education, creativity, and expression. It also seeks to explore how the new generation of musicians can be made aware of the value of the traditional Guru-Shishya Parampara, so that they can preserve its essence while also utilising new methods.

Method – In this research, the Interview Method and Survey Method have been used. Through these methods, the data was collected in a systematic and verified manner. Along with the use of scientific methods, technical and theoretical aspects of music were also included. Primary data was collected using both interviews and questionnaires. Through the questionnaire method, many questions related to music education and the Guru-Shishya tradition were prepared.

Key words: *Guru-Shishya Tradition, Indian Music Education, Teaching Methods, Music Pedagogy, Traditional Education System, Modern Music Education*

Introduction

The Guru-Shishya tradition in Indian classical music is an ancient method in which the disciple learns the intricacies of music by living with the Guru. In this tradition, the Guru not only imparts knowledge of the scriptures and the arts but also instils in the disciple an awareness of etiquette, philosophy, purity, righteous conduct, and practical wisdom. This method of learning continues through oral transmission from one generation to another, in which a person teaches music to their disciple, student, or family members. According to Dr Sudha Patvardhan's book "*Sangeet Shiksha*", "during ancient times, music, which included singing, recitation, and chanting, was considered a complete form of Gurukul-based education. There were no writing or reading facilities. The only means of acquiring knowledge was the Guru himself. This is why these arts were known as practical or experiential arts."¹

Origin and Importance

The Guru-Shishya tradition is an ancient system whose references are found in almost all scriptures of the ancient era. Descriptions of this tradition are also available in numerous texts, Upanishads, epics, and legends. The great sage Bharata has also mentioned it in his treatise on dramaturgy, *Natyashastra*, making it clear that this tradition has been an integral part of our society since ancient times.

The earliest references to the Guru-Shishya tradition can be found in texts such as the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. In the Gurukul system, the Guru provided proper guidance to the students, which included correct pronunciation of mantras, purity of sounds, appropriate ritual methods, and more. Students were taught scriptures, warfare, music, and meditation, among other disciplines.

The role of the Guru was considered extremely important. To find a capable Guru was seen as equivalent to seeing God. That is why it has been said:

Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Guru Devo Maheshwara,
Guru Sakshat Param Brahma Tasmai Shri Gurave Namah.

(Meaning: The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru is Maheshwara. The Guru is the Supreme Brahman himself. I bow respectfully to that Guru.) In other words, the Guru is the creator, the sustainer, and the destroyer. The Guru is himself the supreme divine. Therefore, I worship such a Guru with complete devotion.

Music Education

Music education is a method through which we can acquire knowledge of music. In this teaching system, we are given in-depth information about classical music. It includes the study of sound, notes, rhythm, scales, and their practical applications. Through this, we also become familiar with the traditions of Indian classical music, such as Dhrupad-Dhamar, Khayal, Thumri, Tappa, and Tarana.

Description of Various Gharanas – In Indian classical music, there are various gharanas, which have evolved through the Guru-Shishya tradition. All gharanas hold their unique significance. Each gharana has its distinct style, and this unique style is considered the hallmark of the gharana. Among these, the well-known book "Introduction to musical gharana and great artists" by Khushboo Kulshrestha provides valuable information about many gharanas. She wrote that "the word 'gharana' is derived from the Hindi word 'ghar', which originated from the Sanskrit word 'grih'. It refers to the school or family of musicians who follow a specific style and teaching lineage. In the early 18th century, under royal patronage, many artists received recognition, and thus, teaching centres, gharanas, were established. These gharanas became significant centres for learning, where artists were given high respect. These gharanas had their specialities and were considered benchmarks in their art forms. Notable among them are the following famous gharanas of Hindustani music: Agra, Gwalior, Patiala, Kirana, Indore, Atrauli, Rampur, Bhindibazaar, and Jaipur, etc."²

Distinctive Features of the Guru-Shishya Tradition

- **Mental and Emotional Focus:** The foremost feature of the Guru-Shishya tradition is learning music from the Guru while maintaining deep mental concentration, devotion, and surrender.
- **Moral and Disciplined Education:** The aim of this tradition is not just to provide theoretical knowledge but also to make the student aware of discipline, rules, and moral conduct.
- **Creative Exploration:** In this tradition, students are not only trained in performing music but are also given opportunities for innovation and creative exploration.
- **Oral Transmission:** In the Guru-Shishya tradition, students receive oral instruction from the Guru, which is essential for learning classical music.
- **Significance of Musical Art and Yoga:** Through this tradition, knowledge of musical art, scriptures, and yogic training can also be attained.
- **Life Philosophy and Ethics along with Education:** The goal of this tradition is not just to teach musical skills, but also to make students aware of life philosophies, human values, and ethical living.
- **Guru's Guidance:** In this tradition, the Guru teaches students according to their capability and also trains them in appropriate performance techniques.
- **Respect for the Guru:** The student is taught to revere and respect the Guru as a living embodiment of knowledge, which builds a deep connection with the Guru and other great scholars.
- **Impartial Knowledge Transmission:** In this tradition, the Guru imparts knowledge with impartiality so that the student can further pass on proper music education to future generations.
- **Southern Offering Dakshina:** Once the training is complete, the student offers "Dakshina" to the Guru as per their ability, signifying the end of formal training.

Challenges of the Traditional Teaching System

While the Guru-Shishya tradition is enriched with many unique features, various challenges have emerged due to changes in the education system and the influence of modern techniques. Some key points are as follows:

- **Impact of Modern Educational Institutions:** The modern education system has taken the place of the traditional system. Where earlier people would learn under the guidance of a Guru, now universities and music institutions have taken that role.
- **Change in Lifestyle:** There has been a significant difference between today's lifestyle and the traditional way of living, which has made it difficult for people to adopt the traditional Guru-disciple method.
- **Lack of a Selfless Teaching Approach:** Earlier, the teaching method was based on selfless dedication, but today, people do not prefer to work with such an attitude.

- **Commercial Perspective:** Nowadays, music is increasingly seen through a commercial lens. People view it as a source of income and business, which was not the case in the past.
- **Social Challenges:** There are many social challenges in learning music, due to which people hesitate to adopt it as a full-time career.
- **Cultural Influence:** Compared to Indian values, there is now a greater inclination toward foreign traditions, which is leading to a decline in our traditional heritage and weakening the Guru-Shishya tradition.

Transformed Teaching System

With time, the form of our teaching methods has also changed. Now, under public, scientific, and practical perspectives, the format of the Guru-Shishya tradition has been redefined.

Development of Institutional Music Education

The credit for bringing music to the level of institutional education goes to two scholars of the music world, Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar.

According to a research paper written by Narendra Kaur, “Around 1880, in places like Tikamgarh, Pandit Vamandatt Shastri, Malkhand in Chhatarpur, and Laxman Maharaj in Datia, efforts were made to establish institutions for music education. However, at a broader level, it was Bhatkhande and Paluskar who truly systematised and popularised music education across India.” They established music institutions at various places and made music accessible to the general public. A large number of students began enrolling in these institutions.”³

With their continued efforts and dedication, these two scholars brought the Guru-Shishya tradition to the level of universities between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande

- Established the Marris College of Music, Lucknow, in 1926
- Played a significant role in forming Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, Gwalior

Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar

- Founded the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, Lahore, a branch of which was established in 1905 in Mumbai
- Due to their persistent efforts, today India has many major music universities and institutions. Some of the key institutions are:
 - Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi – 1916 (*Music department added later*)
 - Bhatkhande Music Institute Deemed University, Lucknow – 1926
 - Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh – 1956
 - Jawaharlal Nehru University of Performing Arts, Hyderabad – 1962
 - Karnataka State Music and Fine Arts University, Mysore – 2008
 - Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, Mumbai – 1901
 - Inter University Board, Mumbai (now Association of Indian Universities) – 1931
 - University of Delhi – Faculty of Music and Fine Arts – 1922
 - SNTD Women's University, Mumbai – 1916
 - Savitribai Phule Pune University – Department of Music – 1949
 - Sangit Kala Academy, Raiganj University – 2006
 - Visva-Bharati University, Shantiniketan – 1921
 - Tripura University – Department of Music and Performing Arts – 2009
 - Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi – Music Department – 1920s
 - Delhi University – Department of Music and Performing Arts – 1922
 - Delhi School of Music (affiliated with Trinity College, London) – 1966

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Institutional Education System

An institutional education system is one in which education is formally provided through schools, universities, or institutions. In this method, students receive education based on a fixed syllabus under the supervision of teachers and examiners. According to a research paper written by Narendra Kaur, “Institutional education gave music students a respectful space. It placed music on an equal footing with other subjects. Due to the contributions and efforts of great scholars like Pandit V.N. Bhatkhande and

Pandit V.D. Paluskar, music educators were able to earn salaries and recognition equal to those of educators in other disciplines.”⁴

Advantages of the Institutional Education System

- **Structured Curriculum** – In the institutional education system, a structured and standardised syllabus is followed, helping students understand the subject in depth.
- **Guidance of Qualified Teachers** – This education system involves learning under qualified and experienced teachers, which helps eliminate confusion and enhances student understanding.
- **Accredited Qualification** – This system offers officially recognised degrees and certificates after completion of coursework and examinations, helping students gain employment.
- **Interaction with Other Students** – Interaction with other students is encouraged, which promotes competition, cooperation, and access to broader knowledge.
- **Employment Opportunities** – After completing a degree through this system, job opportunities increase, which is essential for a secure future.

Disadvantages of the Institutional Education System

- **Lack of Personalised Attention** – In the Guru-Shishya tradition, the Guru provides training according to the student’s specific needs, whereas institutional education lacks this personalised guidance.
- **Commercial Perspective** – Nowadays, music is often treated as a commercial enterprise. Many institutions use music education as a business, which affects the quality and seriousness of learning.
- **Reduced Creative Exploration** – In institutional education, all students must follow the same syllabus, which limits their creativity and exploration.
- **Time Constraints** – There are fixed durations for exams and course completion, which leaves less time for deep and sustained practice of music.
- **Distance from the Guru-Shishya Tradition** – Due to the spread of institutional education, people have moved away from the traditional Guru-Shishya system. Today’s education lacks the continuous practice and dedication that existed during ancient times.

Possibilities and Limitations of Music Education in the Digital Age

Online music education is a medium through which we can learn music from home via virtual platforms. Though this method is different from the traditional Guru-Shishya tradition, it still serves as a useful alternative when needed. This method gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic because, during that time, there was no other viable means to receive education. As a result, many universities and schools adopted online teaching methods. In the 1990s, internet services were launched in India, and with them, the spread of online education began. Platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc., are digital means through which we can receive online music education.

Importance of Online Education

Online education is an effective mode of learning, offering the following advantages:

- **Convenient and Flexible** – Online education is a highly convenient and accessible method because it allows learners to study from anywhere according to their availability and comfort.
- **Access to Global Education** – Through digital music education, we can connect with national and international music institutions and universities and learn from skilled teachers and scholars across the globe.
- **Comfort and Safety** – Compared to the traditional mode, online learning is more comfortable and involves fewer physical difficulties. There’s no need for travel or relocation, which saves effort and resources.
- **Pre-recorded Course Material** – In e-learning, students can make use of recorded sessions and digital content for revision and practice as needed.
- **Multiple Learning Tools** – This method allows the use of various digital tools such as PDFs, videos, virtual tools, and mobile apps (like Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc.) to make learning easier and more efficient.
- **Diverse Music Styles** – Through this method, learners can receive education in a variety of musical styles and traditions.

Disadvantages of Online Education

- **Lack of Practical Experience** – Online education lacks hands-on knowledge. In traditional education, the understanding of rhythm, melody, and pitch is crucial, which is difficult to grasp through online platforms.
- **Lack of Clarity in Pronunciation** – In digital music education, the pronunciation of words and notes is often unclear, making it difficult for students to understand properly and creating challenges in learning music accurately.
- **Disruptions in Instrumental Coordination** – In online music education, coordinating instrumental performances becomes problematic. Until students can hear instruments like the *tanpura*, *harmonium*, and *tabla* in a live class, learning becomes more difficult.
- **Decline in Traditional Discipleship** – E-learning methods have weakened the age-old Guru-Shishya tradition. Due to the lack of personal interaction and proper guidance, students do not get the direction they need, which hampers their musical growth.
- **Technical Challenges** – Online music education faces many technical interruptions that affect audio and video quality, causing disruptions in learning.

Familiarise the New Generation of Music Students with the Traditional Guru-Shishya System

In Indian classical music, the Guru-Shishya tradition is an ancient method of teaching that goes far beyond just music instruction. Through this system, students also receive cultural knowledge such as discipline, self-realisation, devotion, and respect for the Guru. Digital platforms have almost eroded this traditional system, which is a serious concern. Today's PhD scholars and music students are largely unaware of this method. Therefore, it is essential to make today's generation familiar with this tradition and train them under the guidance of a capable Guru. Although digital platforms have made music education more accessible, they have also distanced us from our roots. To ensure proper music learning, students must choose a qualified Guru and receive training within the Guru-Shishya tradition. Alongside this, students must also understand modern knowledge such as online etiquette, *tanpura drone* apps, recording software, and other digital tools. They should also learn to use digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook to connect with a larger audience.

Conclusion

The Guru-Shishya tradition in Indian classical music has been a highly significant and ancient system that has existed since the Vedic era. This tradition is not merely a method of music education, but also a path for cultural transmission and preservation. From this research, it is concluded that the Guru-Shishya tradition is an essential part of Indian musical heritage. This tradition not only ensures the proper transmission of musical knowledge but also serves as a bridge that connects one generation to another. The development of modern technologies has, however, caused considerable harm to this tradition. While online classes and digital platforms have advanced our technological progress, they have also distanced us from our foundational traditions. This study highlights how evolving teaching methods have impacted the Guru-Shishya tradition and transformed the structure of music education. The research analyses both the positive and negative effects of online music teaching, along with a detailed overview of music education systems. Through observation and data collection, I interacted with several individuals who unanimously acknowledged that the Guru-Shishya tradition is the ideal way of receiving music education. Their experiences and opinions make it clear that this tradition not only provides practical music training but also deeply influences the student's personality and discipline. This research also illustrates how institutional education methods have sidelined the traditional Guru-Shishya system. Through this paper, I have attempted to highlight the unique features of our ancient heritage so that students of the new generation can learn from this system and contribute something valuable to the future and society. While institutional education has brought music to the university level, it has simultaneously disconnected us from the traditional Guru-based teaching, leading to a focus on curriculum-based learning instead. Therefore, we must understand the depth of the Guru-Shishya tradition and train students through this traditional approach. This study leads us to the conclusion that to truly understand the essence of music learning, we must create a balanced space for both online education and the traditional Guru-Shishya system. We hope that this research will make a significant contribution to future scholarship in the field of music.

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