

## Modern teaching methods in Karnataka music by Prof. Akella Mallikarjuna Sharma

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**Indian** music is considered to have evolved from the musical chanting of *Sama Veda*. Music, like the Vedas, is considered to be the path to self-realization and hence is divine. The study of music, like Vedas, needs discipline and dedication. It is best practiced during the early hours of the day when the brain is best able to assimilate information. It is essential that these routines be integrated into one's training at a young age. With rigorous practice and focused study, one can undoubtedly grow into a skilled musician.

Karnataka music teaching practices continue to advocate traditional methods. Typically, students spend several years training before they formally attain a professional status as concert musicians. This method seems to be more quantitative in nature, wherein the student is taught several items i.e. from the preliminary exercises to the more complex *Kritis*. Hence, this method mostly enhances the student's ability to learn and memorize a variety of items. Not much is taught with respect to *Ragalapana* and *Svarakalpana* barring a few exceptions. This calls for a more analytical approach in teaching *Manodharma Sangita*.<sup>[1]</sup> As the crux of our music is *Manodharma Sangita*, a lot of our efforts must go into these two aspects. Contrary to popular belief, *Svarakalpana* can indeed be taught through the incorporation of easy *muktayis*<sup>[2]</sup> into the lesson plan. These building blocks help the student to gradually be able to sing *Svarakalpana* on their own. Furthermore, this exercise of *Svarakalpana* also paves the way for *Ragalapana* improvisation. Extensive experimentation in teaching methods has proven that even *Ragalapana* can be taught to students by way of notation. The basis for this comes from learning notated *Kriti*,<sup>[3]</sup> and developing the ability to transcribe music accurately. Based on several experiments, it has been proven that a logical and rhythm-oriented plan of teaching makes the aspirant able to sing *Manodharma Sangita*

within a short time, making the entire process of teaching time-bound and result-oriented. This plan is elaborated hereunder. The same has been compiled in the DVD, *msakella's easy methods in learning Karnataka music-2007*.

*Shruti* and *Laya* are the core components of music. While *Shruti* gives pleasure to the listeners; an orientation in *Laya* sharpens the brain, instills self-confidence and enhances performance levels. A rhythm-oriented method of teaching naturally enhances the rhythmical abilities of the aspirant. This has undoubtedly been proved in case of umpteen number of students. The level of the rhythmic instinct of the student must first be assessed by the teacher and nourished using relevant aids. There is no fixed method for achieving this. In fact, multiple methods have evolved based upon the different levels of *Laya*. The efficiency of the teacher lies in identifying the level of *Laya* thereby applying suitable methods. To inculcate a sense of *Shruti* and facilitate acquaintance with *Laya*, it is desirable to expose students to the constant hearing of inspirational, rhythmic, instrumental music, right from their childhood. As per this novel method, the candidate must first undergo the 'Laya' test. In case of children below 6 years, the teacher must demonstrate by playing the beats with two sticks to the rhythm of Instrumental music. The candidate must observe the teacher and simultaneously play according to the beats in Chaturashra-gati<sup>[4]</sup> and Trisra-gati as furnished in the play-list 'AMS-Rhythms for kids' (38-videos) of <http://youtube.com/user/msakella>. The whole exercise must go on at least for a week followed by repeating the procedure with a piece of music. This has to be done in concurrence with the videos that have been provided in the playlists. This can be experimented upon children aged 2-3 years as well. The aspirants must be encouraged to play on the keyboard as per the videos provided in the playlist 'AMS-Rhythm-melodies' on YouTube.

(They have also been provided in the DVD). Later they must render the prescribed Laya exercises before moving on to the preliminary svara exercises. The candidates must first play the four Janta svaras (ss-ss-ss-ss) followed by two Janta svaras (ss-ss) and one Janta svara (ss) in the speed of 60 bpm. First they must play svaras on the keyboard in the second speed i.e. two svaras per second followed by the third speed i.e. four svaras per second. The above svara exercises must be first played on the keys of Shankarabharana-raga.[5] This aids in reinforcing the Svaras along with the rhythmic element. Subsequently they should learn preliminary svara exercises.

Normally children aged between 6 and 8 years would be able to read and comprehend music lessons. Ideally such candidates are eligible for learning music. But it is imperative to have an aptitude for Laya and Shruti. Hence they must be put through various Laya and Svara tests. First and foremost, they must render the Laya exercises which are provided in the videos of the playlist 'AMS-Primary-laya-exercises'. There are 12 videos in four sections. The candidates must be made to render the exercises in the videos. In the first section, Trisra, Khanda and Mishra-jati[6] groups are rendered in Chaturashra-gati which is rendered with both the hands. In the second section Chaturashra, Khanda and Mishra-jati groups are rendered in Trisra-gati (which is rendered with two beats each). In the third section, Chaturashra, Khanda and Mishra-jati are rendered in Trisra-gati (rendered with a single beat). In the last section, Chaturashra, Khanda and Mishra-jati groups are rendered in both Chaturashra and Trisra-gatis. Further the candidates must practice Laya exercises in the 57 videos provided in the playlist 'AMS-Special-laya-exercises' by the end of which they would be able to render Chaturashra and Trisra gatis efficiently. Those who are able to render all the Jati-alankaras from Eka-tala to Triputa-tala in both Chaturashra and Trisra-gatis consecutively must be put through the Shruti-test. Here, it is important to note that the implications of learning *Svara-alankaras* are 1. Laya 2. Talangas 3. Sol-fa syllables of the notes 4. Sound of the notes. On analysis, we find that it is undesirable to expose students to these four different aspects at the same time. Based on several experiments, the *Jati-alankaras* have been formulated in order to familiarize students with *Laya* and *Jati*, thereby simplifying the process of learning.[7] The *Alankaras* are divided into two sets. They must begin the *Alankaras* with

*Ekatala* and move on to the others gradually increasing the number of *Kriyas*. This method is also easy to comprehend. The first group comprises of *Eka-tala*, *Roopaka-tala*, *Matya-tala* and *Dhruva-tala*. The second group consists of *Jhampa-tala*, *Ata-tala* and *Triputa-tala*. It is imperative that the seriatim of *Alankaras* is strictly adhered to.

In the Shruti test, the candidates must be made play and sing various Svaras played on the key-board. Music lessons should only be imparted to those who render the above exercise efficiently. Accordingly, they must be encouraged to simultaneously sing and play on the keyboard. Subsequently they should be initiated to play and sing eight *Saralee-svaras* and three *Datu-svaras*[8] also. It is desirable to teach preliminary exercises in *Shankarabharana-raga* as in *Hindustani* and *Western* music, as most of the notes are independent and ideal for rendering as plain notes. Thus, the student should be initiated to play the *Saralee Svaras*, *Datu Svaras* and *Janta Svaras* in the *raga Shankarabharana* @ one note per each second and later sing along with the music and inbuilt metronome of the Casio. It is preferable to mark the keys of the Casio with the 12 sol-fa syllables such as S, R1, R2, G1, G2, M1, M2, P, D1, D2, N1, N2 and S. The white keys of the Casio correspond to the keys of *Shankarabharana raga*, irrespective of the pitch chosen.

Later, it is essential to play all *Svara-alankaras* in the same order on the keyboard and sing along with Metronome. Subsequently the student must be initiated into rendering *Svara-alankaras* in *Hamsavinodini-raga*, first in *Chaturashra-gati* and later in *Trisra-gati* in *Matrakala* i.e., 4-units per each second. The *Svara-alankaras* are prescribed in the *Panchama-varjya-raga*,[9] *Hamsavinodini* so as to enable rendering of three speeds in even number of *Avartas*[10] such 8, 4 and 2 *Avartas* unlike in the traditional method wherein the *Alankaras* constitute 10 *Avartas* spanning over 10, 5 and 2½ *Avartas*. Simultaneously, he/she should be initiated to practise the *Saralee-svaras*, *Janta-svaras*, *Datu-svaras* and *Alankaras* in other *Avivadi Melas*. [11] However, the preliminary exercises are also provided in the ragas *Mayamalavagowla* and *Lalita* respectively.

Next, he/she must play and sing the 5 *Gitas*[12] in the ragas *Shankarabharana*, *Mohana*, *Shuddha Saveri*, *Kalyani* and *Malahari*. In addition there is a *Svarapallavi* in

Hindola-raga. He/she has to sing the 'Svara' followed by the respective 'Akara' and 'Sahitya'.<sup>[13]</sup> Thus, all the lessons learnt so far must be sung and practiced in three speeds. It is very essential to sing only plain notes, up to *Gitas*. Further they must play and sing the Svarapallavi<sup>[14]</sup> in Hindola raga by which time they would be familiar with all the 12 Svaragatasthanas. Based on this they must practice preliminary exercises in all the 32 Avivadi melas. Simultaneously they must practice the three kinds of Jati and Svara-kalpana exercises in the respective Talas.

Apart from the special Laya and Svara exercises, the candidates must be initiated into Varnas<sup>[15]</sup> in the ragas Natakuranji, Kambhoji, Darbar, Shankarabharana, Kalyani, Begada, Todi and Saveri. These Varnas which are set to Adi tala must be rendered in the speed of one Svara per second. They must first be played on the keyboard with the essential Kampitas and Gamakas. Later on they must practice the Svara, Akara and Sahitya with the help of audios and videos provided. The Varna and Svarajati in Bhairavi raga also must be practiced in a similar manner. To aid this, all these Varnas have also been provided in symbolized notations as the speed of two Svaras per second. The Varnas wherein the ragas have Kaishiki-nishada i.e. the Varnas in the ragas Natakuranji, Kambhoji, Darbar, Begada, Todi and Bhairavi have been notated indicating the speed of one note per second. The candidates must keenly observe the subtleties of the Gamakas and notate the Varnas in the ragas Shankarabharana, Kalyani and Saveri in the speed of one note per second under the guidance of the teacher.

Even though the *Varna* is considered to lay the foundation for *Svarakalpana* and *Ragalapana*, it has been found that the rhythmical exercises along with notated *Ragalapana* help the student abundantly in singing *Svarakalpana* and *Ragalapana* independently, within a short period. While learning *Varnas*, the student should also be initiated to sing easy *muktayis* of three kinds, specially formulated for the purpose of singing *Svarakalpana*. The *muktayis* should first be practiced in *Jatis* and then rendered in *Svaras*. The mathematical element in these *muktayis* is simplified for the purpose of singing *Svarakalpana* easily. The student gets reasonable acquaintance with the easy *muktayis* in the form of *Jatis* even before commencing *Varnas*.<sup>[16]</sup> While learning the

*Varnas*, the student should be initiated into singing easy *muktayis* in *Svaras* along with *Jatis*. Further the *muktayis* should be practiced in *Akara* which in turn enables the student sing *Ragalapana* efficiently. This exercise facilitates in singing all the divisions of *Manodharma-sangita*. Apart from this, he/she should sing *muktayis* in Ragas like Kalyani, Mayamalavagowla, Mohana, Shuddhasaveri, Hamsadhvani, Madhyamavati etc which enhances his/her ability in singing *Svarakalpana*. As the student progresses to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Varna, he must practice *Svarakalpana* in various Sampurna, Shadava and Audava ragas and also in ragas with a variety of note combinations. He/She must also practice *Svarakalpana* for Kritis in various ragas which have a scope for *Svarakalpana* at various starting points.

Apparently, the sets of 10 and 15 *Gamakas* prescribed in our ancient treatises are inadequate in contemporary music. Karnataka music is one of the most complex systems in the world and the need of the hour is to document and safeguard every subtle nuance. Hence an attempt has been made to categorize, symbolize and document the various *Kampitas* and *Gamakas*<sup>[17]</sup> (60 varieties) along with illustrations. The audio-clippings of the same have been provided in the DVD. Similarly twenty-seven nuances of *Kaishiki-nishada* alone are also furnished in PDF files along with audio-clippings. The symbols assigned are in concurrence with the travel of the sound (of the note). The *Varna* and the *Svarajati*<sup>[18]</sup> have been notated with symbols to facilitate a better understanding.

Normally, children below 10 years of age can mostly imitate and reproduce any music by constant listening but cannot comprehend technicalities. So, the students of this age group should be exposed to recorded music repeatedly. Whereas, students aged above 10 years have the ability to understand technical aspects. Hence the inter-relation of the relevant notes of each *Varna* should at first be demonstrated by the teacher at one note per each second. Here the role of the Casio is crucial. The range of the *Gamakas* should first be demonstrated with the help of the Casio. The aspirant should sing and practice *Varnas* along with the Casio. The Casio aids in understanding the range of the *Gamakas* and thus the aspirant will be able to play/sing the *Gamakas* appropriately. This is to enable the aspirant to stay on track despite the absence of the

teacher. Though the *Gamakas* cannot be reproduced exactly as in the Vocal technique, it will undoubtedly help in the proper understanding of the oscillation of notes. Further, the subtleties of the *Gamakas* should be demonstrated by the teacher which can be further substantiated by the DVD. After learning these *Varnas* the student must regularly practice *Akara&Svara* of each *Varna* along with the Metronome periodically increasing the speed of Metronome. This kind of practice helps in all aspects of *Manodharma Sangita*. Also, it is important to understand the logic behind the seriatim of *Varnas*. It has been experimented and found that initiating the student to start with the notes with maximum range of oscillation helps immensely. Hence it is apt to choose notes which adhere more to the *Sampradaya-gamaka*.<sup>[19]</sup> Predominantly, the three notes, *Sadharana-gandhara*, *Shuddha-madhyama* and *Kaishiki-nishada*<sup>[20]</sup> have maximum range of oscillation which is characteristic of *Sampradaya-gamaka*. Among them, *Sadharana-gandhara* and *Kasihiki-nishada* have wider range of oscillation as against *Shuddha-madhyama*. The popular *Natakuranji Varna* having *Kaishiki-nishada* (27 facets) has been selected as the first *Varna*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> *Varna* is the *Kambhojiraga Varna*, which has *Shuddha-madhyama* and the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Varna* is the *Darbar-raga Varna* which has all the three notes. On completion of these *Varnas*, the aspirant gets familiar with all the three notes which are *Sampradaya gamaka* oriented. Later, the *Varnas* in *Shankarabharana*, *Kalyani*, *Begada*, *Todi*, *Saveri* and *Bhairavi* and *Svarajati* in *Bhairavi* follow suit.

Generally, most musicians recommend the students to learn 10 or 15 *Kritis* in any *Raga* to get the complete picture of any *Raga*. In this context, we must recollect the process of extracting ghee from milk. Just as mere collecting of large quantities of milk does not help in the extraction of ghee; mere learning of several compositions does not help or suffice. Instead, one must acquire the skill of deducing the *Raga* from compositions. Numerous experiments revealed that repeated listening to the segmented *Sangathis*<sup>[21]</sup> of the *Raga* with a proper understanding of all the oscillations of notes is more effective in singing *Ragalapana* than learning a number of compositions by heart in that *Raga*. Keeping the above in view, 36 *Ragas* have been suitably composed and notated with symbolized oscillations, divided into segments and provided with

independent audio clippings in the book *Sangita Svararaga Sudhawritten by Prof. Sharma*. To begin with, segmented *Sangathis* of *Shankarabharanaraga* should be loaded into an mp3 player to enable the student listen to it, repeatedly. Later the *sangathis* can be practiced as a whole which can help immensely in *Ragalapana* and also arriving at a proper approach to *Ragalapana*.

In order to gain much acquaintance with the above aspects, the students should listen to all the items provided in the DVD for a number of times at their residence, at every level of practice. Apart from the duration of his/her training in the class, the student must be able to practice independently for the maximum period during the rest of the day with the help of the pre-recorded DVD. In this novel method of teaching the teacher mostly initiates and motivates the student into deeper learning. Thus, in this novel method, while direct teaching is less than 10%, initiation is more than 90%. This is highly effective in making the student independent, instilling tremendous confidence in him/her. The student is required to practice daily for a minimum of two hours till the completion of *Gitas* and four hours from the beginning of *Varnas*, which will quicken the process of learning. At the end of *Varnas*, he/she will become able to sing or play the *Svara*, *Akara* and *Sahitya* of the notated *Kritis*, with minimum guidance of the teacher. The student will also be able to sing/play *Svarakalpana* with easy *muktayis* along with brief *Ragalapana*, before the completion of *Varnas*. This is a unique feature of this modern teaching method and it has been successfully implemented on a number of students, producing gratifying and amazing results.<sup>[22]</sup> However the system has been rapidly evolving to suit the needs of students and to make learning easier. It is important to note that the teaching methods need to be customized as and when the need arises<sup>[23]</sup> Shri Sharma has been teaching with relevant audio-visual aids but doesn't sing or play on his Violin while teaching. He merely initiates his students into and guides them. He has been training some Vocal as well as Violin students in the country as well as abroad producing as tounding results.

. It has also been successfully implemented on students from the backward community with neither a musical background nor the environment, which is incredible.<sup>[24]</sup> It also goes to prove that Music can be made accessible to all, irrespective of their economic, sociological and/or cultural background.

## Footnotes

1. Manodharma Sangita is music that is creative in nature and also has a scope for improvisation. Ragalapana (Raga elaboration) and Svarakalpana (rendering of Svaras with improvisation) are major aspects of Manodharma Sangita.
2. Tihai
3. Composition which is a major concert piece
4. The number of Aksharas per beat determines the Gati.
5. This exercise was first experimented at a school in Hyderabad by the author and her Guru in the year 2009-2010
6. Jat is are sounds of the Mridangam. Trisra-jati, Khanda-jati and Mishra-jati are sets of three, five and seven.
7. In the traditional method, the Alankaras were/are being taught from Dhruva-tala which is complex to begin with. Hence the Alankaras now have been formulated in a new order which moves from the simple to the complex making learning easier. This was one of the first experiments conducted by Shri Sharma which formed the basis of the methodology. The order of Alankaras was formulated and is being implemented since 2003.
8. Saralee Svaras, Datu Svaras and Janta Svaras are preliminary lessons.
9. A raga without a Panchama. Raga Hamsavinodini is derived by removing the Pancham of Shankarabharana Raga. The Alankaras are taught in the raga Lalita in case the teacher opts to impart preliminary lessons in the raga Mayamalavagowla.
10. Tala cycle
11. Ragas which have Avivadi Svaras.
12. Compositions taught in the preliminary stage
13. It is highly essential to practise all compositions in Svara, Akara and Sahithya as it helps with the accurate rendering of Svarasthanas.
14. Composition also known as the Jatisvaram which has Svaras and Jatis but no lyrics. It is learnt after the Gitas. It has an inherent rhythmic beauty.
15. A musical form which is the precursor to the Krithi. It is also a concert piece.
16. Students have been singing Svarakalpana even before the Varnas. They have been trained in Jati mukhtayis along with Gitas eventually leading to Svarakalpana for the same.
17. Oscillations of notes. The PDF files consisting of definitions of Kampitas and Gamakas along with illustrations have been provided in the DVD.
18. Compositions sung with both Svara and Sahithya. Conventionally, simple Svarajathis are taught before Varnas. The best Svarajathis have been composed by Sri Shyama Shastri and are sung in concerts too. Prof. Sharma has prescribed a Svarajati in Bhairavi composed by Shyama Shastri. It has been chosen for its intrinsic rhythmic, lyrical and melodic beauty.
19. Shri Sharma has classified the Gamakas into Sampradaya (traditional) Gamakas and Lalita Gamakas. The detailed explanation with illustrations have been compiled and provided in the DVD.
20. Komal Gandhara, Komal Madhyam and Komal Nishad
21. Phrases
22. This article has been written based on several interviews conducted periodically with Shri Sharma since 2002. The author has been writing and translating his work at regular intervals. The author has also been interacting with students who have been trained in the methodology.
24. The related videos have been posted to <http://youtube.com/user/msakella> in the playlist AMS-Swaeroes musical talent at Adavimallela. The author has interviewed Dr Prasanna Mantrartanam on 1-4-16 at 6.30 pm. She is a music teacher and has been success fully implementing the above teaching methods at Telangana social welfare residential school for girls in Adavimallela, a remote village in Khammam district, Telangana. The latest telephonic interview was conducted on 10-2-17 at 6.15pm. Owing to the success of the methodology, the department is planning to set up a Music school exclusively for the school students of Telangana social welfare residential schools across the state, she said.

