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Techniques and Methods of Training and Tuning the Voice

Vidyashree Salimath
Research Scholar
Department of Music and Fine Arts
Central University of Karnataka, Gulbarga

Dr. Jayadevi Jangamashetti
Assistant Professor
Department of Music and Fine Arts
Central University of Karnataka, Gulbarga

Abstract

Voice culture is essential to Indian classical music, encompassing conscious practices to improve voice quality, control and range. This paper explores various techniques and methods employed in training and tuning the voice within the context of Indian classical music, with a special focus on the Kirana Gharana tradition. Drawing from ancient treatises and contemporary practices, it examines the importance of breath control, awareness of vocal positions, avoidance of misconceptions and learning from gurus. Through empirical, analytical, and applied research methods, the paper emphasises the significance of integrating theoretical knowledge with practical exercises to cultivate voice culture effectively. By understanding the unique voice cultures of different Gharanas and implementing regular practice routines, vocalists can enhance their voice quality and performance in Indian classical music.

Keywords : Voice techniques, Voice Training, Indian classical music, Voice Culture, Gharanas, Kirana.

Research Paper

Introduction

A good voice is the lifeblood of a singer. It is a natural instrument for human beings. Voice culture is the process of consciously doing certain special voice-related practices to improve the voice's inherent nature. In simple terms, voice culture cultivates voice through scientific methods by adopting proper voice production practices. Just as in any string instruments and blowing instruments, there are specific positions for the correct swaras to emerge. Similarly, each specific swaras emanating from the human vocal cords can be well cultivated only when the desired specific swaras are emitted. It is essential for a singer to be aware of the specific position in the vocal cords where the swaras are coming out of his/her voice, whether the voice is being produced by him/her correctly or not. In addition, some breathing and vocal exercises can be practised consistently and consciously to improve the voice. These practices help us gain control over our voices.

My Guru Pt. Kaivalyakumar Gurav always used to say that the voice will never be spoiled by practice for long hours, but it will be spoiled by wrong practice. The first cause of our voice problem is some of our misconceptions. We have unknowingly adopted wrong methods like to sing higher notes we raise our head, for low notes we keep our head down. It just locks our throat and puts pressure on our voice and the voice will be damaged.

The main reason for such wrong practice is that while we are listening to performances of any artist, we are easily and unconsciously influenced by the artist's body movements, i.e. how the artist moves his/her head, hands. Because it is visible to us. But most of us failed to understand the Voice texture, voice quality of an artist, which is invisible. We failed to understand how he or she is modulating their voice, how he or she has breath control. We have just adopted wrong practices like when we find it difficult to sing high notes, we try to force ourselves to sing. This is the very first stage we start to face voice problems.

Research Problem

The Voice Culture practice is primarily effective in alleviating voice problems. Compared to Western music, the modern day Indian classical music has been less

focused on the practice of Voice culture. But, it doesn't mean Voice culture is a new concept in Indian music. In Indian ancient music treatise many musicologists mentioned and discussed about voice related concepts like voice production, qualities of good singers as well as bad singers. So in this scenario a need is felt to put out defined thoughts and exchange specific ideas for developing conscious practice of Voice culture.

Objectives

- To analyse whether the empirical study of voice culture in Indian classical music needs more attention.
- To examine how ancient Indian musicologists exhibited their thoughts on voice and sound production and how they are relevant for all times.
- To emphasise adopting conscious voice-related practices to develop a good voice and alleviate voice-related issues.
- To understand the ancient musicologists' perspective on vocal culture and its importance in developing a voice.
- To examine how musicologists' theories on voice are relevant in the context of contemporary vocal music practices.
- To provide insights for contemporary vocalists on improving their voice quality and selecting appropriate vocal styles based on ancient musicologists' theories on voice.

Hypothesis

The quality of voice varies from person to person. Conventional practices like Swaras, Alankaras, Paltas, Ragas, a variety of Taans and other voice betterment practices may help to gain a good voice. But, despite the above-referred practices, many singers are facing voice problems or losing their voice because they knowingly or unknowingly practice incorrectly. And they are looking for a solution to their problems. So, it is important to create awareness of the significance of implementing Voice culture coupled with conventional voice practices to improve their overall vocal performance. Hence, Voice culture is of no use if it remains a mere theory on paper, but the pragmatic application alone can increase its significance.

Relevance of the study

Theory (Shastra) and practical (Prayogik) always complement each other. In Indian music, much attention is paid to the grammar of ragas and Taalas. There is less focus on the qualities of a singer, which have been discerned in the music treatises. Although it is incorporated into syllabi and curricula, it is limited to the theory part but rarely incorporated into experiments. It is equally necessary for a singer to have a conscious knowledge of the Raga and Tala he is presenting and know voice production. Because each person's voice quality is different, it is essential to know the quality of his/her voice.

Methodology

This research paper used empirical, analytical and applied research methods. In applied research, a researcher intends to examine the practical solutions for the problems. In empirical research, knowledge derives from one's own experience rather than theory. So, here, the research was carried out by studying voice culture experimentally from my Guru and then incorporating it into my own practice. The solution to the problem is found through the practice of voice culture under the guidance and observation of my guru. By critically evaluating different techniques and methods of voice training, the way in which voice culture can be achieved is studied through analytical methods.

Voice culture in Indian Context

When we look at the types of veenas of ancient times, there are mainly two types of veenas mentioned. One is Daivi Veena, and the other is Manushi or Daravi Veena. Daivi veena means human vocal cords, which produce sound itself compared to a veena. It is a divine gift to man. Swaras are produced from different parts of the human body. Manushi veena is a variety of manmade veenas (Veenagayathri).

There are references in the treatises of music on voice or sound production. Bharatamuni, considered the first musicologist of Indian music, mentioned five characteristics of a good voice (Tripati). Narada mentions Daivi veena in his treatise Naradiya Shiksha. Narada's Sangeet Makaranda describes the various positions of sound production (Nadotpatti) in the human body. In Matanga's Brihaddeshi, there is a reference that mandra is produced from the chest, madhya from the throat and tara saptaka from the head. Even in Sarangadeva's Sangeet Ratnakara, it is said that Mandra is produced from the heart, Madhya from the throat and Tara from the head. (Simha 118).

Looking at the treatises of all these scholars, it is clear that they had found out through their research the correct

order of sound production. It seems to be a concept in today's voice culture.

The merits and demerits of a singer are mentioned in the musicology treatises (texts). Sarangadeva, the author of Sangeeta Ratnakar, describes the good qualities of a singer. In these, some are voice-related qualities, like-

1. हृद्यशब्द–The voice which attracts the heart (Hruday ko aakarshit karne wala)
2. सुशारीरो–Good Voice (achha ya Madhur Shareerwala)
3. सर्वस्थान उत्थगमकेषु अनायसलसद् गतिः–Singing gamakas effortlessly in all octaves.
4. आयत्तकंठः – voice which has control.
5. जीताश्रमः– The one who sing without any effort.
6. सर्वकाकुविशेषवित्त–Who have knowledge about all Kakus

Also, he explained the errors which singers unknowingly practice.

1. संदष्ट–Singing through teeth
2. उद्धुष्ट– Singing fully in open voice
3. सूतकारी–Breathing sound is heard while singing
4. कंपित–Voice shakes while singing
5. कराली–Singing with a terrible voice
6. करभ–Singing with a raised neck
7. झोम्बक–Singing with pressure so that all the nerves of the neck swell
8. तुंबकी–Singing with a swollen face
9. वक्री–Singing with neck bent.
10. विरस–Singing without emotions and rasa.
11. अव्यक्त–Singing without pronouncing the words correctly
12. स्थानभ्रष्ट–Being unable to sing in three octaves.
13. अनुनासिक–Singing in nasal." (Vasant 116,118)

There is another concept in Indian musical texts called 'Kaku'. It means modulating the voice to bring out different kinds of emotions. In Natyashastra, Bharata Muni explicated kaku in a dramatic context, while Saranaga Deva's Sangeet Ratnakar brings out its elements with Special and executive references to music. (Simha 137)

At present, many gurus and artists are imparting knowledge about voice culture. Indian artists like Pt. Ajay Chakrabarty, Pt. Kaivalya Kumar Gaurav, Prof. Unnikrishnan and many more. Some basic voice practices are common for all Vocalists, whether they are classical vocalists, semi-classical vocalists or light music singers. The very first practice is Omkar Sadhana. 'Omkar Sadhana' is a part of Pranayama. The 'Pranayama' word is a confluence of two words, 'Prana' and 'Ayama'. 'Prana' means to breathe and 'Ayama' means expansion, length and rising. 'Pranayama' involves various methods of breathing exercises or practices. It includes both slow, steady and fast breathing exercises like Kapal Bhati, Anulom Vilom, Brahmari, Ujjayi pranayama. With Omkar, A kar, Aa kar, Ee kar, Uu kar, E kar, Oo kar, and Mm kar in all these vowels, we should do swaraabhyasa. These practices are common to all Vocalists.

It helps to improve respiration and enables singers to connect with abdominal breathing. Through this, the singer can control the breath and balance as per the raga's grammar. Through these practices, an artist can develop depth and range of voice. Eshita Chakraborty mentioned seven important factors that cultivate our voice. Those are pitch, Breathing, Softness, Volume, Accuracy, Kaku and Guidance.

"The Idea of abdominal breathing and Omkar Sadhana for singing is to allow for filling up of both the apex and base of the lungs and using your total lung capacity in a sophisticated way. When one uses abdominal breathing, he/she creates a resonance in the chest." (Shah)

Significance of voice Culture in Hindustani Classical Music: Specifically, in Kirana Gharana

Indian classical music is a raga-based musical system, whether Carnatic or Hindustani. Although both music systems are raga-based, voice culture is different. It completely depends on the tradition we are determined to learn. When we begin to learn any tradition of music, we learn not only swaras, swara sthanas, Alapchari, different types of Taans, and notations in raga, but also how to produce voice according to that tradition, what kind of basic practices are required to achieve such voice.

"Generally, students are attracted to learning new Chijen (compositions) and Raga. But a good teacher should always emphasise the need to improve their voice first, as the absence of good voice would make their learning fruitless." (Chakraborty 32)

Even though we listen to ragas with the same kind of swaras in Hindustani and Carnatic music, we get a completely different experience while listening. There are many reasons for that. One of the reasons is voice culture. For example, in Carnatic music, the guru starts training Gamak Yukta Guyana right from the beginning

of learning. So, the disciples became accustomed to that voice culture very easily.

As a learner of Hindustani music, I have focused on Voice texture for Khayal. Prof. Devdhar was the first Hindustani vocalist to study voice culture. He travelled to the U.S.A. to study the voice training techniques of Western vocalists. There are various styles in Khayal Gayana, which are known as gharanas. There is no doubt that different Gharanas have different voice cultures. When looking at all the gharanas, some practices are common to all the gharanas, while some are specific to the respective gharanas. Omkara Sadhana, Shadaj and other swara sadhana, Alaknara practice such practices are essential for all gharanas. At the same time, the specialities of each Gharana have to be adapted through specific practices. The major gharanas of Hindustani music in present are Kirana Gharana, Gwalior Gharana, Agra Gharana, Jaipur Gharana, Patiala Gharana, Rampur Sahaswan Gharana and Mewati Gharana. In Karnataka, Kirana Gharana, Gwalior Gharana, Agra Gharana, and Jaipur Gharana mainly these four Gharanas are in vogue. As I have been practising Kirana Gharana, I have especially reviewed this paper.

Hindustani Music is not just an intellectual exertion. A disciple attains mastery through steady and conscious practice, along with the knowledge received from the Guru. The more he/she practices, the more he/she becomes mature in voice and singing. The musical knowledge gained through constant practice over the years, and the emotions combined with singing give a sense of bliss to the audience. If music is unemotional, subject only to intellectual expansion, it does not give empathy.

There is one saying in Kirana Gharana: "Taal Gaya to Baal Gaya, Magar Sur Gaya to Sir Gaya". From this saying, we can understand the importance of Sur in this tradition. Sur is vital in this Gharana. The Kirana Gharana musical heritage came mostly from instrumentalists—chiefly Sarangi players. So, the soothing sound of the sarangi is heard in the Gaayaki of Kirana Gharana artists.

A feature of this Gharana is the exploration of the subtle details of the raga by gradually unveiling the Swaras of the raga. To achieve such sonorousness, the kirana gharana artists focus more on swaraabhyasa and alapchari abhyasa.

Many reputed musicians of today refer to Abdul Karim Khan Saheb as 'Sachche swaron ke devata' (the master who sang perfect notes). He had cultivated a special way of voice production so that his sweet and melodious voice mingled indistinguishably with the drone of the Tanpura strings. This was acquired by him through years of strenuous Mandra-sadhana, early morning practice for several hours in the lower notes. He stressed voice culture in his pupils also, and even when he was at the zenith of fame, he never gave up this daily mantra sadhana. (Mishra)

Alaap is the major part, sung for the longest time in Khyal. So, it is difficult for the artists to mesmerise the listeners through Aalap. Kirana Ghrana's central concerns are Swara and Alapchari. The Kirana Gharana logic demands interlacing the notes (Swaras) very delicately and melodiously. The salient feature of this Gharana is to present the alaap with a natural blend of internal emotions and swaras (notes). To meet the needs of an overall emotive approach, the elaboration of Alaap with a slow tempo by modulating the voice is required.

Hence, the heirs of Kirana Gharana mostly prefer to sing Alap Pradhan Ragas like Bhairav, Yaman, Bhoopali, Shuddha Kalyan, Todi, Puriya, Puriya Kalyan, Puriya Dhanashree, Marwa and so on.

Conclusion

The voice should always be in the possession of the vocalists. Only then our voice will function according to our instructions. No matter how much knowledge the vocalists have about the raga and taal, if there is a problem with the voice, the vocalists have fear, tension and anxiety. Then he/she will not be able to perform comfortably. With voice culture, we can gain flexibility in our voices. It enables artists to sing in three octaves effortlessly and helps to sustain notes (swara) for a long time. Just as the earth is tempered before sowing the seed, the voice can be cultivated by certain special practices. Guru's role in this regard is most immense.

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