

The Internet as a Resource for Musical Ideas

Hassan Azad

Dedicated to Professor Patrick Moutal

This article is addressed principally to the advanced student of sitar in the West. The East, especially Japan and China, have produced world-class musicians who play western music and have contributed to all aspects of this music. Yet, despite the interest in the music of the Subcontinent since the early sixties and the immense popularity this music enjoys amongst professional western musicians, there seem to be no performers of note – at least to my knowledge- which the West has produced in this genre. What could be the reason? Is it that the West has perfected a method of education which has allowed this music to take root in the East? Is it the numerous studies which have been composed by outstanding composers which has facilitated its transmission?

The author knows several families of professional musicians from Pakistan. They train their children and students in an intuitive way: musical ideas are communicated more or less in the same way as linguistic ideas are transmitted in the average family. There is a great emphasis on learning by imitation and on Riyaz (practice). The lack of a good teacher available for extended periods is no doubt part of the answer to the questions posed above. For an instrument like the Sitar- or for that matter any instrument- there is no substitute for a teacher. Only a teacher can communicate the correct positions for the hands and for producing notes of different colors and character and the time tested exercises for training on the instrument as well as basic compositions and aural concepts. So what should a student in the West do when access to a teacher is limited only for a few weeks in a year? I believe that the online resources are not utilized as much as they could be. There are treasures available on the internet- thanks to the selfless devotion of people like Patrick Moutal- which can go a long way in facilitating for the advanced student the learning of music of the Subcontinent. For example, if you type on your favourite search engine the question: What is the difference between a taan and a sargam- you will get very informative links. An aural dictionary, which would have hyperlinks to all musical terms like sargam, alaap, taan, murki, zamzama, meend etc and their explanations by aural examples is very feasible and desirable and I hope that some young person will take the responsibility of making this available on the internet.

The lack of studies composed by first-rate musicians could be compensated by a collective exercise of transcribing the wealth of music freely available on line. This is not as difficult as it sounds. The modern software makes all this very approachable. One needs only to download a suitable version of the Media Player- one which has the option of varying the speed. Whereas, with an ordinary tape recorder transcribing would take an immense amount of time and patience, now, with modern software, the pointer can be moved and the phrases replayed as often as one desires, even at half the speed, to get the notation right and produce an acceptable transcription. Of course, *one needs a trained ear for this and only a teacher can help you with this.*

An advanced student, who has access to an Ustad only for a few weeks in a year would thus have interesting material to copy and extend, and maybe, in a moment of inspiration, create some thing new.

Some practical details

Transcriptions take time but only someone who has attempted transcriptions with a tape recorder can appreciate the enormous saving in time which the modern software allow. Without the convenience of this and search engines, which are really modern oracles, I wouldn't have dared to do this. I searched for "free downloads media players" and quickly found players with the option of varying speeds. Then, listening to the music at reduced speed, I scribbled the notes, set up my laptop, typed the notes and then played the music again on my table top computer at reduced speed. Dashes (-) were used to represent beats where there were no notes. This was then refined to indicate sum and khali etc.

In the Appendix, I have transcribed some music of Ustad Vilayat which is available on line. Ustad Vilayat Khan was a genius. He has left his mark on the art of sitar for all times. The purpose of the transcriptions is not to copy his playing- that would be impossible- but rather to help the advanced student in understanding and working through the thoughts of a master musician.

How does one learn anything? The usual stages are imitation at a very primitive level, guided learning with the help of a teacher, followed by copying works of masters, analysis of works of masters and finally introspection. So the transcriptions are really useful at an advanced stage. One needs a competent teacher to get to this stage.

The Internet can never be a substitute for a teacher. I don't know of anyone who has learnt driving through a manual. So a teacher will continue to be essential, because there are so many non-verbal things to communicate.

Finally I want to write briefly about note recognition. I recall reading about this in the Wikipedia. It was similar to my personal experiences. I used to take very long walks - minimum 2 hours- and, to occupy myself, would think about music (and mathematics). I knew several popular songs and I tried to recognize the relative position of the first note of the songs I knew. I practiced also things like SR SG SM SP SD SN SS and then RG RM RP RD RN RS RR etc. in my head and after some time I could make out the notes in various compositions.

This article is inspired by Patrick Moutal's Indian Music Page. This music is not the heritage of the West yet an immense amount of labor has been invested. I thought that we, from the subcontinent, also owe something and should not hold back. After all, Western Classical Music is flourishing in Japan and China and perhaps we have to change our attitude if we want Indian Classical Music to grow in the West.

Finally, Music is a way of life (Barenboim- BBC Reith Lectures) and an antidote to violence and we, from the Islamic world, should make a conscious effort to show that it is really a very important part of our lives too.

Appendix:

I have transcribed two compositions of Ustad Vilayat Khan. Search for "Patrick Moutal Indian Music" and download his Behag and Shaym Kalyan. You must listen to the notes at reduced speed while reading the transcriptions and repeat this as much as necessary till the music is internalized.

The notation which has been used is quite primitive. But this is not very important as you will be hearing the notes while reading it and as this music is meant to be reproduced singly, a precise system of notation is not as important as in orchestral music. Anyone is welcome to improve the notation and correct mistakes.

A Transcription of Raag Behag

Source: 'Patrick Moutal Indian Music Page'

Artist: Ustad Vilayat Khan

In the transcription, a stroke (') before a note means that the note is produced by striking with the plectrum; the other notes are produced by a combination of glides and sideways slides. The rhythmic cycle is of 16 beats. To keep track of the cycle, the note which coincides with the first beat of the cycle is typed in bold letters. If there is no note on this beat, it is marked X.

The meaning of words like 'Murki', Taan etc as well as superscripts and any unexplained notation will become clear from the music. The development is in free tempo.

The beats are marked only for the Gaat (refrain). For example /SS/ means that the two notes are played in one beat (matra) and /S/ means that the entire note lasts for one beat. . The focal note-sum- is in boldface. Once again, a ' means that the note is produced by striking with a plectrum; the other notes are produced by combinations of glides (soot) and sideways slides (meends). You must listen to the notes while reading this, and repeat this as many times as necessary to be able to reproduce the phrases on the sitar.

Colour code: Notes of the middle octave are in black, of the low octave in blue, of the high octave in red.

Tarabs : (Resonance strings) **S**NDPMmGRSS**N**

Gaat: S / S S/(=snrs)/ **NN** /**S**/ S/ S/ SN/ ^NP /NN/ S/ SN/S /G m/

P M /Gm/

G/ -/ S S/(=snrs) **N** N/ **S**/

1st development:

/-/-/-/' PSNNN ___PNS `PN`PSNN___ `D`P`m`G`m`P`N ___ `S`N`R`S

___`NS`N(`snrsn as a murki) `SGm`R`S ___`P`N`R`S ___`NS`N (as a murki)

`SG__`G`G__`GRS`R`S__`SGm`R`S_
 `NSN (murki)`S`G`mG`GP`P`P`PM`PM (-^DPM PM (murki))`M`M(G)
 `GmMGm`G__
 `S`G`m^ND`ND(P)`P`DPM(G)`PmG`G`m`G__`S`G`m`G`N`NS
 (merges into refrain)`Gm/`PM/`G`m/`G/`S(=snrsn)`N`N/`S/

2nd development:

/-/-/-/`G`m`D(D)P__`P`DPM`M`P`GmG(murki)____
 `G`m`P`N-__`N`N(D)P____`G`m`P`N`D`N`N`DN`PM`G`m`G__
 `G`m`P`N__`N`N`S-`S`S_`GR`S`__X_
 `S`G`m`G`G`G(R)`S__`S`G`m`GM`M`M`MG`PM`DP`PG(m)`PGm`R`S__
 X---`P`N`S`S`S`G(R)S`N`D`NS`NP`PM`G`m`G__

Taan: `S`G`m`P`N`S`R`N`S`G`m`GP`MG`GR`S
 `S`N`D`P`M`P`N`DS`N`PM`m`GR`SN`S`---

Taan: GGG mmm PPPP PM NDPMGRSN **SNDPMPGmGRS**NS -
SNDPMPGmGRSNSSS
SNDPMPGmGRSNSSS
SNDPMPGmGRSNSSS

Merges into refrain: `S/`S/`S`N/`NP/`N`N/`S`R/`S`N/`S/`G`m/`P`M/G/
 `MPGm`G(R)/(2beats)`S/`N`N/`PS.

A Transcription of Shaym Kalyan

Search for "Patrick Moutal Indian Music" and download the Shaym Kalyan of Ustad Vilayat Khan. The rhythmic cycle is of 16 beats. The refrain begins on the 9th beat of the cycle. The focal note (sum) is at the second occurrence of R: it is written in bold

letters. To keep track of the cycle, the first best is marked by X or a bold letter and the ninth beat by O.

The space between two slashes (/ /) represents one beat. Listen to this with reduced speed till it is completely absorbed. Some of the phrases are syncopated. For example, the first Ga (G) occurs on the 7 ½ beat.

The variety and arrangement of taans is a very important aspect of improvisation and the customary names of the taans have been written in brackets.

Notation: M means Ma sharp, m means Ma natural. There is a g (Ga komal) somewhere; it is not a typo but a slip of the finger while playing. I kept it because this has to be read with the online Shaym Kalyan on Professor Moutal's site. For practicing, the g has to be replaced by R.

S/S/-/R/-----
:X/-/-/-/-/-/-/9th G/-/-/ G/m/R-S/**R**/-/ -/-/-/-/-/- /9th G/-/-/ G/m/R-S/**R**/(S)/-/-/

5th (Behlava): S/R/S/-/ D/P /-/**N**/S/

14th (taan/koot): RS/**NS**/ RM/**PD**/ PM/DP/MP/Gm/RS/**NS**/G--GmR-**SR**/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/

1st (taan/avroh): -**RS**NDPMPGmRS**NS**G--GmR-**SR**/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/

15th (taan/choot/alankar)): **NSR** MPD **NSR**MPDPMPMGmRS**NS**G – refrain: GmR**SR**/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/-/

3rd (taan/aaroh): **MPNSR**DPMPMGmRS**NS**G(m)R**SR**/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/

1st (behlava): **R**-MMP/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/

2nd (taan/alankar/avroh/takrar): PM DP ND PM DP MPM.GmR-R

PMDP MNDP **MPNSRSDSDP** MDPMPMGmRS**NS**G-refrain: mmR-**SR**/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/-/

3rd (behlava): MMP/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/

1st (taan/choot/avroh/koot) : -**DP** RS **NS** RM PD PM ND PM DP MP Gm RS **NRS**/-/-/X/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/-/

3rd (taan/avroh/koot/aaroh/alankar): **SN DP MP NS RS NmRS NSRMP GmR mRSN**

SRMPDPMNDP **MPNSRSDSDP**.**MMM.PPP.GGG**

mmmRSNRSNS/DNDPMPS

mmRS mmRS mmRS NSR- - - - -G- - mmR-SR- - - -SRS⁰ / -/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/-/-/-/-/-/-

/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/-/-/-/PS

SRS--SS-S- -

4th (behlava) RMP/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/_

1st (taan/takrar) MMP MMP MM PM PM PM PM PDPM DP DP DP DP MDPMPMGmR.

RMPD PM NDPM DDP./14th /-/-/X/-/-/

3rd (taan/takrar/aaroh/avroh) RMRMPDPM NDPM PNSR

MMMP MNDP MDPMPMGmR.

RMPD PM NDPM PNSR NSRMPD

GmRS NRSN SNDNDPMDPMPMGmRSNSG - GmR-SR /-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/

Antra: X/-/-/-/-/-/-/-/ 10th :R-RMPNNS- - -SRS/ -/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/-/-/-/

6th (taan/sapaat/aaroh/avroh): RS NS RMPNSRSN

SNDP MP GmRS NSRMPNSRSRS- -

Antra: 10th R-RMPNNS- --SRS---NDNS'NP - PP(=pmdp)GmRRMP(P)

: 15th (taan) SNDPMDPMPMGmRSNSG- - - refrain 12th mmR-SR/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/SS-R/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/

-S/-/RS/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/-/-/-/-/-/O/-/-/-/-/-/-/X/-/ (repeat S- rsssss in 2X)

2nd (taan/ badhat/ avroh/aaroh/koot/alankar) GmRSNS

GmRSNRSNSNDPMPNSRSNmRS

NSg(R)MPGmR mRSN

SRMPmRMPDPMNDPMDPMPM

Gmm RRR MMM PPP

NDPMPNSRNSR-P-G-

RSN RSN SNDNDPMP-

10th (taan) SNDPMPG. mmRSNSR R/-/-/-/-/-/-/

9th G--GmR-SR—/-/-/-/-/-/0/-/-/-/
13th GmRSR—/-/-/-/-/-/0/-/-/-/-/-/

16th (taan: sapaat/aaroh/koot)RSNSRMPNSR

NSRMPDPMGmRS

NRSNDNDPMP

NNDPMPGmRSNS G/-/-/-/-/

12th Gm-R-SR/—/-/

Gm-R-SR—/-/

Gm-R-SR—/-/-/-/-/-/0/-/

SS--R----

(P)S

Comments: Characteristic phrases: NSRMPD- G^mR-

Resting notes: R,P S- R abundant in many compositions.

Aaroh-Avroh: NSRmPNS- SNDPmPGMR-S

Most taans take off from R,P,S,N,G,M and involve characteristic phrases.

Finally, here is a transcription of a couple of minutes from a performance of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan. As one can see, even the most straightforward pattern acquires great beauty on account of the speed at which it is played.

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwE-G0CFgtg>

Gaat from 7th matra:

7th dnsgmg-nsg d-gmdnsn/ 9th sgm-g-nsg

0:21 (x2)1st gmdns-dnd.gmg.nsndn/ 9th sgm-g-nsgd-gmdns-9th - - - - -

0:31 X (x3) 2nd dnsgsn.dnsgmdmgsn.dns/9th sgm-g-nsg

0:35 1st (x3)dnsg.sgmd.mdns.dndm.gmgs.ndns/9th sgm-g-nsg

0:40 1st (x3) gsndnsgmdmgsndnsgmgsns-/ 9th sgmg-nsg d-gmdns

