A Revaluation of Learning Practices in Indian Classical Music Using Technological Tools

Julien Debove  
*EHESP Paris, juliendebove@hotmail.fr*

Dorian Cazau  
*ENSTA Bretagne, cazaudorian@outlook.fr*

Olivier Adam  
*UPMC University Paris*

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A REVALUATION OF LEARNING PRACTICES IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC USING TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS

Julien Debove
EHESs Paris – CAMS
UMR CNRS 8557,
Paris, France
juliendebove@hotmail.fr

Dorian Cazau
ENSTA Bretagne - Lab-STICC
UMR CNRS 6285,
Brest, France

Olivier Adam
UPMC Univ. Paris 06,
CNRS UMR 7190, Institut
Jean Le Rond d’Alembert,
F-75005, Paris, France

ABSTRACT

Each khyāl performance of Indian classical music is unique and unreproducible because it is mainly based on improvisation. As for most orally transmitted musical repertoires, learning practices are essential as they guarantee that the musical codes are properly reproduced from one generation to another. In Indian classical music, practice, tightly imbricated in the pupil – teacher relation, favors clearly the imitation. Students tend to reproduce more or less successfully their master’s style. That’s why in order to be creative, it is necessary that each musician develops his own skills of understanding, experimentation and invention.

Today, technological tools have considerably transformed our way of learning. From now on, it is possible to have access to considerable data for the understanding of traditional music, and to listen, record and analyse them through various software tools. Indeed, works by visualization allows reporting how common to all these musics (fingerings, musical process, improvisation, patterns…). Through various software and practice examples from Rajam’s dynasty (hindustani violin players), hindustani violin lessons and rāg performances, we will present a “toolbox” for all musicians and musicologist to improve their self-study.

If the pedagogy and teaching can give us comprehension keys, the apprenticeship, such as it is practiced in North India and in the long master to pupil’s tradition, favors clearly the imitation at the expense of the assimilation. The pupil learns above all by imitation and by impregnation, without taking the time to understand or to write. He learns to know a number of ingredients, but does not inevitably learn how to use it. In this way, the pupil tends inexorably to reproduce with varying degrees of acuteness the master’s style. His space of creativity is extremely reduced even non-existent. The musician will feel difficulties finding his own style. For that purpose, it is necessary to him to be able to stand back, to be able to experiment, invent and understand.

The technological tools really transformed our way of learning in our daily practice. So the analysis via a number of IT data and software allows to understand and to learn musical processes, specific ornamentations, rarely taught. In addition, it is possible to question the relationship between what is taught by the master and what is produced on stage. Through the comparison of different performances, different performers and different learning lessons, one can clearly dissociate the stored material from the improvised material, i.e. the fixed components from the modular elements. This current work aims to study this question, focusing on different rāg according to the vocal tradition of khyāl within the Rajam’s Dynasty, violinist descendants.

In this communication, we investigate the possibility of using modern computer-based technologies as a teaching assistant system for Indian classical music. Due to its improvisation nature, a comparative approach is necessary to analyse it. For example, by comparing recordings between Hindustani violin lessons at the Hubli-Gurukul (India, August 2010-2012) and Hindustani rāg performances, it is possible to show up the way(s) Rajam Dynasty musicians transform the structural and structuring elements of a rāg. At a larger scale of analysis, by multiplying the interpreters on a same rāg, we could quantitatively compare their different improvisation strategies, and better understanding the fundamental elements of a rāg that need to be properly taught to every musician.

1. LINKS BETWEEN PERFORMANCES AND APPRENTICESHIP

We notice that it exists a correlation between Rajam’s lessons (Gangubai Gurukul, Hubli, India, August 2010-2012) and musical performances. Indeed, we can observe that a number of formulas, that Julien Debove learned in Gangubai Gurukul, are repeated in the musical performances. It means that during the performance, the musicians dig into his memory bank and add it formulas transposed from another rāg or improvised formulas.

As we can observe on the figure 1, the cycle is structured in the following way:

- establishment of a formula -red oval-
- suite of variations -oval yellow if it is played by one musician and orange rectangle if it is played by two different musicians-
- resolution on C medium -fuchsia rectangle- and chorus2 -light pink rectangle-

The chorus serves as a link from one cycle to another.

1 The structuring elements are useful elements for the continuity of the structure. These elements are generally signals allowing the passage from a subsection to another or from one part to another. The structural elements are the elements forming part of the structure.

2 Sometimes, the chorus can be substitute by a melodic phrase repeated three times (tihāa).
used to talk about music of oral transmission or western music. The difference lies mainly in the medium used:
- external memory for music written
- internal memory for music of oral transmission.
Indeed, when we use the term composition to describe melodies laid down by oral transmission from individuals to individuals, internal memory to internal memory, whatever audio message’s quality of memorization or assimilation, we cannot imagine that the audio message will be transmitted from one generation to another without a slight modification, even if the references to earlier records can avoid excessive transformation.

So we can perceive within the various examples below duration or rhythmic’s variations within theme’s modules (transmitted orally in a strictest way).

Figure 2, Vilambit Ektāl (slow 12 beat cycle), theme, rāg Yaman, N. Rajam, 2012, Hubli

Figure 3, Vilambit Ektāl (slow 12 beat cycle), theme, rāg Yaman, Ragini Shankar, 04/06/13, Lille

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musicians</th>
<th>Formulas &amp; variations</th>
<th>Variation play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N. Rajam, 2012</td>
<td>1,5,6,9</td>
<td>Introductive formula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Shankar, 04/06/13</td>
<td>1,2,4,7,11,13</td>
<td>Conclusive formula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Debove 08/16/13</td>
<td>1,3,4,5,6,9,10,11,12,13</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. TYPE OF IMPROVISATION AND SOUND REPRESENTATIONS

2.1 Thematic variations
If learning topics are strictly taught from master to student, during the performance, some rhythmic and timespan variations can be made. Thus, we perceive a slight difference in the notion of composition, that can be

Figure 1. Scores of the 6th rhythmic cycle of vilambit ektāl (slow 12 beat cycle), rāg Yaman, N. Rajam lessons, August 2013 realized with ianalyse.
2.2 Structural improvisation

As underlined by Nettl (1974), we consider a musical repertoire, composed or improvised, as the realization of a system. One of the approaches to describe such a system is to divide it into theoretical component units. These units are, so to speak, blocks of construction accumulated by tradition and of which the musicians (within the tradition) make use, by choosing, combining, recombining and rearranging them. These blocks of construction are, even in a single directory, of various types.

This type of improvisation is seen in action in North Indian classical music. So, in the *drut tintaḷ* (fast cycle of 16 beat), whatever performances, we find in each performance the same ingredients placed in a certain order and transposed according to the *rāg*. We notice also some fundamental processes of development defined by Widdeess (2006) as melodic expansion & rhythmic intensification.

![Figure 4. Structural evolution of *drut tintaḷ* (fast 16 beat cycle), *rāg Mālkauns* & *Yaman* (with Excel).](image)

2.3 Melodic variations

Combined together, Sonic visualiser\(^4\) and Acousmographe\(^5\) can build genuine listening guides, associating music

\(^1\)Fast improvised melodic lines
\(^2\)Sonic Visualiser, developed by Queen Mary University (London) is an application for viewing and analysing the contents of music audio files.
\(^3\)Acousmographe, developed by G.R.M (Paris) is a software of listening and visual representation of the music. He allows location, annotation and thorough description of any music or any sound document.
playback, sound visualization and precise and fine analysis of various extracts. They allow to perceive melodic inflections difficult to hear, to highlight the notes and ornamentation and understand the overall shape of the different musical passages.

The only drawback is that the implementation of these tools requires a lot of time and work because all additions (image, text, scope, notes, ornaments) are done manually.

For the needs of intelligent practice respectful of traditions, it is advisable to set out fixed recordings and diverse analyses to allow, by the empirical practice, access to many data. From file XML, the Monika software allows to do numerous statistics that are very useful for musical analysis (as for example, upper or lower melodic peaks, number of occurrences of each note, intervals most used, internal finales etc.).

Here are some of these diagrams drafted thanks to Monika software:

3. COMPREHENSION & THEORIZATON

3.1 Monika⁶ & Carnet de Notes
(http://carnetdenotes.paris-sorbonne.fr/)

So, it is possible to perceive some inflections of an almost inaudible sound upward played at the beginning or at the end of musical sentences.

Here are some of these diagrams drafted thanks to Monika software:

6 Monika is a software of description of monodies drafted in VBA for Excel. Developed by N. Méeus, professor at the University Paris Sorbonne.

⁷ These recordings are obviously a version among many others and don’t represent models. It is thus that by the depth and comparative analysis we can have a minimum of objectivity.

⁸ Monika software considers internal finals in its widest release. These are the notes preceding silence.
3.2 Musical strategy on rajam’s style in ālāp
Melodic analysis of various ālāp\(^9\) via a synoptic view can distinguish different melodic phases and better understand the way of improvising (see figure 9). By listing all internal finales in order chronological the first time when they appear (defined here as notes finishing a melodic sentence of a duration upper at three seconds) as well as the set of the internal finales on C, it is possible to distinguish four essentials phases. (symbolized by the grey sinusoidal curve).

These phases correspond to the various possibilities which offer themselves to the musician. None of these phases is compulsory, but the phases 1 and 2, 3 and 4 are consecutive (Gorakh Kalyān, Māru Bhāg, Mālkauns, Jog 1 & Bāgeśrī).

We also notice that the musicians can play solely phases 3 and 4 (Yaman & Jayjayvantí) or 1 and 2 (Jog 2 et Bāgeśrī Kāṇada) or none of these phases when the ālāp is very short (Desí) by stressing only the tonic (C).

3.3 OpenMusic\(^10\)
New technological tools like OpenMusic allow us to create musical processes modeling. So I have create a fast melodic line of synthesis. (see figure 10)

It consists of groups of 4 ratings whose first note is accentuated (represented by the sub-patch "segmentation 4") groups of 3 notes that the first note is accentuated (represented by the sub-patch "segmentation 3") , groups of 2 ratings whose 1st note is accentuated (represented by the sub-patch "segmentation 2")

These modules are played consecutively. Notes within these modules are played randomly, but linearly. Tān begins with an onset formula and ends with fixed phrases repeated three times (tihāī) on the right side of the diagram. The scale of the tān is fixed on the left side of the diagram. Each time the object is revalued, music notation and music changes.

What is very interesting is that it corresponds perfectly to a tān as could play musicians in the performance.

4. PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS AUTOMATIC MUSIC TRANSCRIPTION
In this paper, we presented the use of audio software for the analysis of improvisation styles in Indian classical music. These software could be more efficient by implementing new methods from automatic music transcription (AMT). However, despite a large enthusiasm for AMT challenges, and several audio-to-MIDI converters available commercially, perfect polyphonic AMT systems are out of reach of today’s algorithms. This lecture will be started from our previous works (Cazau et al., 2013 ; Cazau et al., 2015) to present a new multichannel capturing sensory systems of traditional acoustic plucked string instruments, including the following traditional African zithers: the marovany zither (Madagascar), the Mvet lute (Cameroon), the N’Goni harp (Mali). These systems use multiple string-dependent sensors to retrieve discriminatingly some physical features of their vibrations. For the AMT task, such a system has an obvious advantage in this application, as it allows breaking down a polyphonic musical signal into the sum of monophonic signals respective to each string. The development of this technology has already allowed the constitution of a new sound dataset dedicated to AMT evaluation for plucked-string instrument repertoires, used in Cazau et al. (2015), and including audio recordings, MIDI-like transcripts and sound samples over the instrument pitch ranges. This technology is very convenient to develop extensive sound corpus for repertoires without written supports, including orally transmitted repertoires, as well as improvisation.

5. REFERENCES


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\(^9\) Slow introduction where we discover the rāg and all its features. Ālāp also refers by extension slow improvised melodic phrases.

\(^10\) OpenMusic (OM), developed by IRCAM Music representation research group (Paris) is a visual programming language based on Lisp. Visual programs are created by assembling and connecting icons representing functions and data structures.
Figure 9. Melodic ways of ālāp, N. Rajam & R. Shankar

Figure 10. Creation of a synthesis « tān »