

ITC Sangeet Research Academy Guru Pedagogy Project 2011-12

By Dr. Amelia Maciszewski (sangeetmil@yahoo.com)

Introduction. ITC's Sangeet Research Academy/Kolkata (ITC-SRA) is a unique institution whose vision and mission is to promote and propagate Indian classical music by 1) recreating the setting of the traditional Hindustani music *gurukul* (master-disciple system of training); 2) offering opportunities for scholars to conduct academic and scientific research on music; and 3) presenting concerts, workshops, and lecture demonstrations on Indian classical music (ICM) for and by the distinguished gurus of the academy, other renowned ICM performers, and scholars of the academy. A pioneer of corporate patronage of classical music in India, ITC-SRA was created in 1977 as an independent Public Charitable Trust with a mandate that it would not seek monetary help from the government and would be professionally run.

Up to now, SRA has concentrated solely on the teaching of vocal Hindustani classical music. Until approximately a decade ago, the Academy was almost entirely focused on training scholars in the genres *khyal* and *thumri-dadra*. In the first decade of the new millennium an exponent of sarode and one of sitar were appointed as Gurus at the Academy, and instrumental music was added to its offerings. In July 2012, a shehnai player and a *dhrupad* singer were appointed to the faculty as Gurus, further broadening the Academy's offerings.

ITC SRA does not offer degrees or diplomas. It has neither age restriction nor a requirement of academic qualification for admission. Each scholar is assigned to a Guru of the Academy who provides the scholar with individual attention. Thus, teaching at the Academy is unlike the conventional pedagogical system of a university. The only criterion for admission is talent, and the audition process is rigorous. A scholar's progress is carefully monitored by the Guru and the Academy's Expert Committee, and the period of his/her instruction is also determined by this Committee.

As of August 2012, six gurus (all vocalists), six musician tutors aka "junior gurus" (among them one sarode player), and five accompanists (three sarangi players, one tabla player, and one harmonium player) reside on campus full time. Four gurus (one sitarist, one sarode player, one vocalist, and one shehnai player) commute to campus full time to hold classes. One guru (vocalist) commutes from Pune to spend ten days per month in residence on campus. Seven accompanists (six tabla players and one harmonium player) commute on a part-time basis.

SRA currently has 25 fulltime resident scholars. Additionally, 28 school and college-going children from all over the country come to the Academy for music instruction. Most classes are conducted in the gurus' respective living quarters, with the exception of those gurus who reside off campus and conduct their classes in designated classrooms on campus. Virtually all the students receive scholarships which pay their tuition, living expenses, gurus' and accompanists' fees. Although the majority of students are vocalists, there are several sitarists, sarode players, a violinist, a tabla player, and, most recently,

several shehnai players. Very recently, SRA has begun to develop a program for international students, offering short-term (up to 3 months) residential courses in vocal and instrumental Hindustani music at the Academy based on the Guru-Shishya parampara. Courses are customized for each student depending on the his/her need. SRA accepted the first two international students, one American sitar student and one Chilean vocal student, in the spring of 2012.

There are three basic wings of the Academy: 1) music instruction, where the emphasis is on performance; 2) research on music and acoustics using signal processing devices and statistical analysis; and 3) music-based knowledge consisting of SRA's audio, video and print (academic) archives.

While pursuing the academic instruction in the music wing, scholars are encouraged to further formal education as well. Several SRA students are engaged in post-graduate and doctoral studies as well as research, both academic and scientific.

Guru Pedagogy Research Project.

SRA constantly seeks to update and make relevant the Guru-Sishya parampara practiced on its premises by means of contemporary inputs. In this project, a team of researchers is conducting an in-depth study of the pedagogy of the Academy's, as practiced by its distinguished Gurus in the Guru-Sishya parampara manner.

The team has spent the past 15 months conducting in-depth interviews of each Guru and observing (and sometimes participating in) demonstrations of his/her performance and/or teaching. The sessions have been captured on videotape, logged and edited by two of the research team members, with the help of technical staff. In the sessions, each Guru was asked a set of qualitative questions regarding his/her teaching methodology and philosophy. During this question-and-answer-session, attended by one or more other Gurus, the Junior Gurus, and a group of academic, ethnomusicologist, and scientific researchers, team members were encouraged to question the Guru on matters in addition, but preferably relevant, to the main body of questions. Each Guru was also given the opportunity to demonstrate musical points either by performing him/herself or having students demonstrate.

As of August 2012, the project is in the analysis stage. The qualitative analysis, based on logging and compilation of data culled from the video footage, is in progress. The next step will be statistical analysis. Following this, the findings will be presented to the Trustees for their approval. Once review is completed and approval made, a stage-wise plan will be created and steps taken to implement it.

Why is this project being carried out?

The overarching question that drives this research is: *how can a comprehensive, rigorous pedagogy of Hindustani music be developed that combines a certain standardization of musical knowledge/values with the nuanced training that the traditional gurukul provides?* The issue at hand is sensitive, given the idiosyncrasies of this highly personalized, traditional method of training.

The early 20th century project of standardization and democratization of Hindustani music in India's institutional education resulted in a considerable compromise in the artistic development of performers. In contrast, SRA is an extraordinary institution that has carved out a niche in India as a contemporary institution that offers gurukul training to outstanding students. In this spirit, it seeks to maintain a balance between nurturing traditional art music and musicians at the highest qualitative level and supporting cutting-edge research on the musical acoustics, cognition, and perception, as well as musicological research on ragas, gharanas, compositions and presentation style, and voice culture, among other things.

However, SRA faces several problems in this web of competing strands of knowledge. Probably the main problem, faced in the teaching wing, is the probability of insularity and inconsistency in knowledge and transmission thereof that students could experience as they train in the gurukul system. Another problem is the compartmentalization of wings. While there is some dialogue between the academic research and teaching wings, more work needs to be done to synthesize and derive synergy. A meta-commentary needs to be developed that looks at the interconnectedness among the three wings. Once developed, it needs to be applied and enforced in a way that is mutually intelligible and relevant.

At the highest conceptual level, I suggest that the project seeks to tease out *intrinsic qualities of Hindustani music and musicianship and the motivation for achievement of these qualities*. The commonalities and variances discovered through this investigation and their vectorial resolution through statistical analysis may shed light on ways to create a road map for future Gurus to use in their training methodology.

Several points, come into play as part of this process:

- Archival value – documents the distinguished elder gurus' teaching philosophies, pedagogies, and often life histories for posterity and to provide a model for junior gurus to draw upon.
- Increased accessibility of SRA's repository of audiovisual materials on music to make it easier for students to engage with these exceptional resources as learning tools.
- Elicit a set of each Guru's motivating factors that drive the way they teach.
- Elicit an embodied pedagogy from each individual Guru first, then compare with the others.

It is hoped that upon more nuanced collation of the data collected and logged, we can begin to draw pedagogical inferences about what works and what doesn't in the gurukul system. Based on these inferences, SRA could, depending on need, begin to adjust their guidelines to implement some positive changes in their "curriculum." The vision and mission of the Academy, as stated at the beginning of this essay, would remain the promotion and propagation of ICM through the selection and training in the gurukul tradition of outstanding students by distinguished Gurus. It follows that the Academy's

reach gradually could be broadened to include other types of traditional world music, the most logical being Carnatic, with attention given to increasing accessibility (aka “popularity”) of ICM among the general public. This could be realized by outreach programs offered to underserved populations, similar to, or in partnership with, the model provided by SPIC-MACAY and other organizations. The essence is one of working with and for the cause of ICM.

Kolkata

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