

Melsthai varisai

Raga: Mayamalavagowla (15th Melakarta Ragam)

Arohana: S R1 G3 M1 P D1 N3 S

Avarohana: S N3 D1 P M1 G3 R1 S

Talam: Adi

Notation Courtesy: Rani, www.karnatic.com and Chitraveena Ravi Kiran's book

Notes from Chitra Veena Ravi Kiran's book (with some additions):

Musical Phrases: It is important to first practice karvai (long notes: see the sarali varisai class) before the varishais. Gradually simple combinations of notes can be tried. Teachers can introduce small musical phrases like GM , - GMP, - DDP, - PMG, - MGR, - GMGRS- and so on. Over a few sessions, the phrases can get perceptibly sophisticated.

Akaaram: After a few such sessions, the same phrases can be rendered using the vowel "a" as in "America". This is called "akaaram" and it is a very integral part of Carnatic music, with particular reference to vocal music. Thus, exposure to akarams is very essential at this stage, albeit in a simple form.

Varishais - Sequences:

The great composer Purandara Dasa, hailed as the Father of Carnatic music, created a set of fundamental exercises nearly 500 years ago, which are followed even today. There are 4 main types of varishais.

Sarali Varishais: These fundamental sequences enable the student to get a feel of melody with rhythm. The logic is quite obvious here. The 1st varishai is a plain ascent and descent of the notes of the raga. The 2nd varishai focuses on the second note from S, namely R (in the ascent) and N (in the descent). The 3rd varishai centers on the third note (G and D) in the ascent and descent respectively. The fourth varishai concentrates on the fourth note M and P. This goes on upto the 7th varishai. The last 3 are general exercises. Some books have split the last sarali varishai into 5 parts, but singing it as a single varishai is more instructive.

Janta Varishais: These are forceful sequences, which facilitate the students to add weight and majesty to their voice. They make use of a form of ornamentation called "spuritham" which is rendering a note twice: plain the first time, and with force from the previous note (i.e. the note just below this note in frequency) in the raga the second time. Teachers must take care that the concept of spuritham is very clearly embedded in the students' minds. The tendency to render it in a bland and insipid manner should be avoided.

Melsthai Varishais: These are higher octave sequences, which increase the students' vocal or instrumental range. Again, the logic is easy to understand. The first is the

simplest and every subsequent exercise adds a new phrase to the previous one. The progressively cover notes upto Pa in the higher octave.

Dhatu Varishais: These are zigzag sequences that increase the students' overall command of notes.

Alankarams: These are multi-tala sequences composed in the 35 talas. But usually 7 of these are selected and taught to the students.

Students should be taught to render all these exercises in at least 3-4 speeds. Once they perfect this technique, they could practice most of them in the 3rd speed. It is ideal to render each varishai twice, once just with the swaras, and again, with akaaram.

Speeds in Carnatic music: In carnatic music, speed is relative. It is measured as the number of notes per beat of the tala, rather than the number of notes per second or minute.

The first speed is rendering one note per unit of the tala. The 2nd speed is exactly double of this, i.e. two notes per unit. The 3rd speed is four notes per unit. The 4th is eight notes per unit. The 5th is 16 notes per units and 6th speed is 32 notes per unit.

Speed of the tala is rarely varied; only the speed of the music is. But even this is not accomplished in an arbitrary manner. There is a mathematical precision to it. For instance, the 2nd speed is exactly twice as fast and the third is exactly twice as fast as the second and so forth.

Advanced exercises:

Some *selected* varishais can be repeated with:

- Akaram, Ee-kaaram, U-kaaram
 - With Gamakas, in different speeds
 - In different sampurna ragas: Kalyani, Shankarabharanam, Kharaharapriya, Thodi
 - In selected symmetrical janya ragas (without tala): Mohana, Hamsadhwani, Sri ranjani,
 - In selected asymmetrical janya ragas: Bilahari, Mohana Kalyani
 - In selected vivadi ragas: Ganamurthi, Chala Natai
 - In bhashanga ragas: Bhairavi
 - In different nadais: thrishram, khanda, mishra
 - Starting off-beat (eg: after 1 or 3 aksharams after beat)
- (this is particularly useful for instrumental practice)

Notation hints: (this notation follows Rani's notes in www.karnatik.com)

s = sa ; r = ri ; g = ga ; m = ma ; p = pa ; d = dha ; n = ni ;

Capitalized letters are in the higher octave.

Letters with a period "." after them are in the lower octave.

1. Dheergam at melsthayi "S", and touch of "R" (d n S R)

s r g m | p d | n S ||
 S , , , | S , | , , ||
 d n S R | S n | d p ||
 S n d p | m g | r s ||

2. Dheergam at melsthayi "S"

Focus at melsthayi "R" (d n S R - S S R S - S R S n)

Some janta (S S) and zig zag usages (S R S n - d p m p)

s r g m | p d | n S ||
 S , , , | S , | , , ||
 d n S R | S S | R S ||
 S R - S n | d p | m p ||
 d n S R | S n | d p ||
 S n d p | m g | r s ||

3. Dheergam at melsthayi "S"

Touch of melsthayi "G" (d n S R - G R S R)

Focus at melsthayi "R" (d n S R - S S R S - S R S n)

Some janta (S S) and zig zag usages (S R S n - d p m p)

s r g m | p d | n S ||
 S , , , | S , | , , ||
 d n S R | G R | S R ||
 S R - S n | d p | m p ||
 d n S R | S S | R S ||
 S R - S n | d p | m p ||
 d n S R | S n | d p ||
 S n d p | m g | r s ||

4. Dheergam at melsthayi "S"

Touch of melsthayi "M" (d n S R - G M G R)

Focus at melsthayi "G" (d n S R - G R S R and d n S R - G M G R)

Focus at melsthayi "R" (d n S R - S S R S - S R S n)

Some janta (S S) and zig zag usages (S R S n - d p m p)

s r g m | p d | n S ||
 S , , , | S , | , , ||
 d n S R | G M | G R ||
 S R - S n | d p | m p ||
 d n S R | G R | S R ||
 S R - S n | d p | m p ||
 d n S R | S S | R S ||
 S R - S n | d p | m p ||

