

Vocal Exercises

Hindustani Classical Music



DEEPAYAN
MAJUMDER



This booklet is provided by Deepayan Majumder for beginner and intermediate practitioners of Hindustani (Indian) classical music, specifically targeted towards individuals learning vocal music. The exercises presented here should be practiced with discipline and deep care under the guidance of a trained vocal professional or a coach. Always consult your guru or mentor while practicing new exercises.

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Exercises curated by Deepayan Majumder
Transcribed by Aditya Joshi

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Introduction

Paltas (पलटा) are series of melodic patterns or exercises designed to develop vocal agility, precision, and control. These exercises are crucial for mastering the intricate ornamentations and fast passages characteristic of Indian classical singing.

If you are a beginner or looking to refine your skills, this guide will provide you with step-by-step instructions, helpful tips, and examples to enhance your vocal practice. Practicing Indian music, particularly Indian classical music, requires a disciplined and immersive approach that integrates both technical exercises and emotional expressiveness.



Though music transcends language, culture and time, and though notes are the same, Indian music is unique because it is evolved, sophisticated and melodies are defined.

- Dayananda Saraswati



Instructions

To start with, it is crucial to establish a consistent practice routine. Dedicate a specific time each day to your practice sessions, preferably during the early morning hours when the mind is fresh and distractions are minimal. This regularity helps in developing muscle memory and internalizing the nuances of the ragas and talas.

While practicing, you must have established your key note (scale) for your practice. Play a tanpura without additional embellishments in a moderate volume. The tanpura provides a continuous drone, establishing a tonal foundation upon which all melodic explorations are based. It trains the ear to recognize subtle microtones (shruti) and ensures that the singer remains in tune. In a long run, it trains you to attain an intuitive affinity to the scale you will be practicing on.



Beginning your Riyaaz Session

If you do not have a tanpura or a digital device, you can use the high quality tanpura sounds on my Youtube Channel. Click the following link or search for [deepayan majumder tanpura](#) on Youtube.

Focus on maintaining correct posture and breath control throughout your practice, as these are fundamental to producing a clear and sustained sound. If you are a novice singer, begin your practice session with a standing note. Begin with basic vocal exercises to warm up your voice.

Practice singing the chosen standing note (e.g., Sa) steadily and clearly, ensuring your pitch is precise and consistent. Hold the standing note for an extended period. Focus on maintaining a steady pitch, clear tone, and consistent volume. Pay attention to your breath control and support from the diaphragm.



Beginning your Riyaaz Session

Continuously check your intonation against the tanpura. Make sure you are hitting the standing note accurately every time you return to it. Recording your practice sessions can help identify any pitch deviations.

Work on your breath control to sustain the standing note without wavering. Use diaphragmatic breathing to ensure a steady and supported tone. While practicing, try to connect emotionally with the standing note. Feel its stability and centrality.

In the beginning, you should start with a two to three minute standing note practice followed by other warmup exercises explained by your teacher.

You can then start with holding each note for a breath before starting with the Paltas.

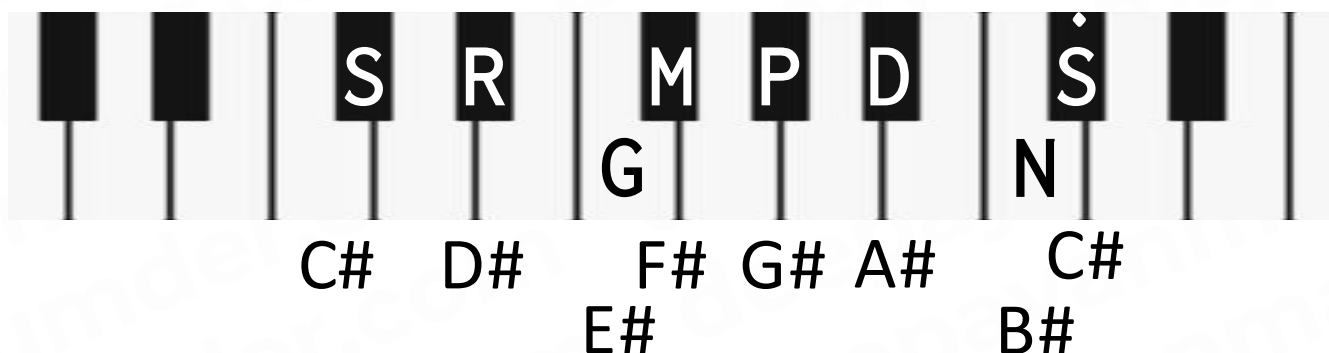


Understanding Notations

This book uses the standard Bhatkhande notation. The notes always begin with Sa (written as S) on the Key note, followed by Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, and Ni. The notes corresponding to C Major scale are described below.



The notation can be easily transcribed with no changes to suit your scale. The following example shows how the key changes if the root note is C#. Hindi/Urdu speaking musicians describe it as first black (पहली काली).



Understanding Notations...

More complex thaats/ragas/scales may use a different set of notes. In Indian music, sharps and flats are not a property of all the notes. Only the fourth, Ma can have a sharp, and only Re, Ga, Dha, and Ni may have a flat. Root note (Sa) and the fifth (Pa) do not have sharp or flat notes.

Sharp Notes: R G D N

Flat Note: M

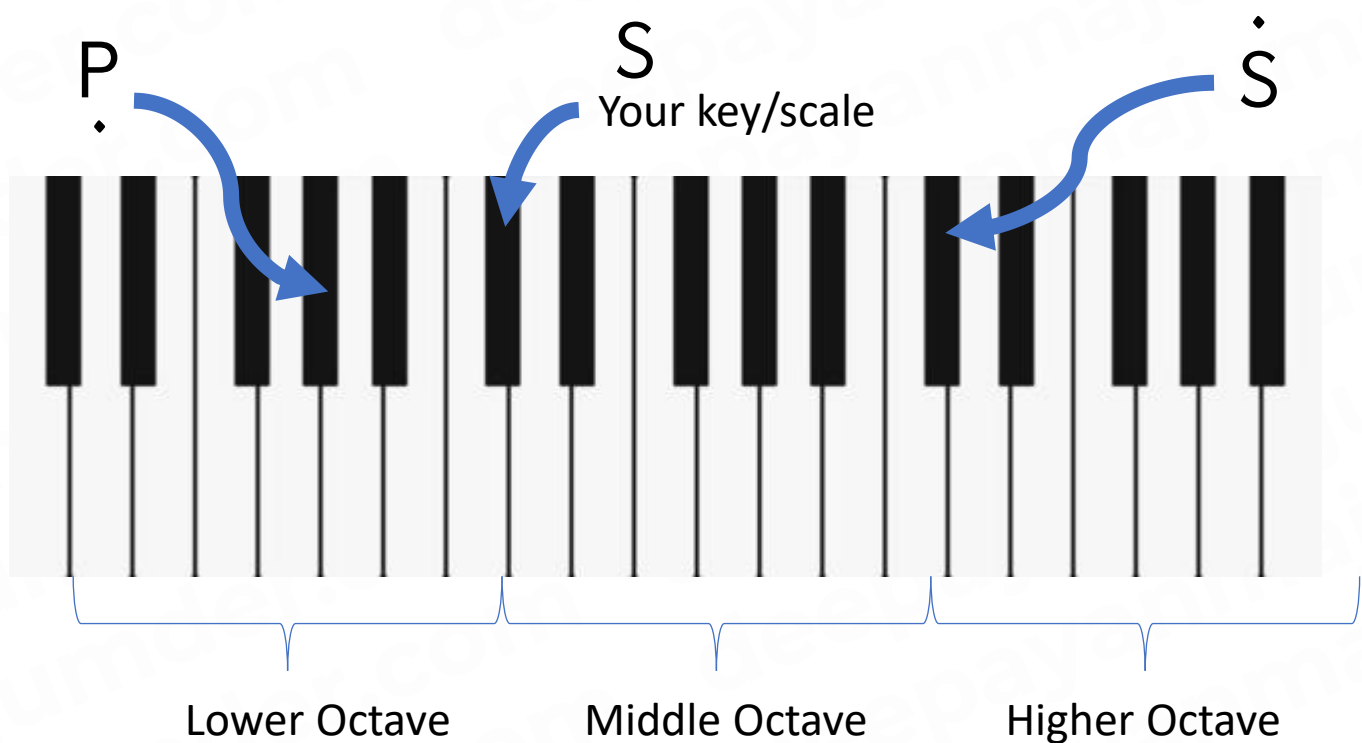
Different scales and ragas may use these notes, e.g. Thaata Bhairav has two flats, the second and the sixth.



Understanding notation is important for transcribing and reading music. Such notes are out of the scope of this booklet. All the exercises present in in the following pages use only the Shuddha (pure) swaras but advanced learners may use the notes from other scales.

Understanding Notations...

A vocalist is able to go beyond just one octave of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa, and thus for a musician, it is important to identify the notes in lower and higher octave. The key identifies the beginning of the most comfortable range of your voice. This note is the *Sa*. The *Ni* below it is part of the lower octave. The notes from the lower octave are written with a dot below them, and the notes in the higher octave are written with a dot above. The figure below shows the Pa in the lower octave, and a Sa in the upper octave.



Understanding Notations...

Thus regardless of your scale (chosen first note), the notes will be called Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni, and upper Sa, written as:

Ar	S	R	G	M	P	D	N	Ṡ
Av	Ṡ	N	D	P	M	G	R	S

The first line is called Aaroh, also known as Arohana or Arohi. It is the ascending order of notes in the scale. It is the sequence in which the notes are sung or played from the lower to the higher pitch, creating an upward movement in melody. The second line is called Avaroh, also referred as Avarohana or Avrohi. It is the sequence in which the notes are sung or played from the higher to the lower pitch, creating a downward movement in melody.

In the exercises described in the following pages, Aaroh and Avaroh may be shown in different rows or two different columns in a table.



Introductory Paltas

Start by singing or playing these notes in a steady, even tempo, focusing on clarity and accuracy. Use a tanpura to maintain the correct pitch. Practice these patterns slowly at first, gradually increasing the speed while ensuring each note is distinct and in tune.

1

Ar SRIRGIGMIMPIDIDNINŚ
Av ŚNINDIDPIMMGIGRIRS

2

Ar SRGIRGMIGMPIMPDIPDNIDNŚ
Av ŚNDINDPIDPMIPMGIMGRIGRS

3

Ar SRGMIRGMPIGMPDIMPDNIPDNŚ
Av ŚNDPIDNDPIDPMGIPMGRIMGRS



Introductory Paltas

4

Ar SRGMP I RGMPD I GMPDN I MPDN Š[•]
Av Š[•]NDPM I NDPMG I DPMGR I PMGRS

5

Ar SRGMPP I RGMPDD I GMPDNN I MPDN Š[•] Š[•]
Av Š[•]NDPMM I NDPMGG I DPMGRR I PMGRSS

6

Ar SRGMPD I RGMPDN I GMPDN Š[•]
Av Š[•]NDPMG I NDPMGR I DPMGRS

7

Ar SRGMPDN I RGMPDN Š[•]
Av Š[•]NDPMGR I NDPMGRS



Paltas with Repeated Notes

Once you can comfortably and correctly sing the paltas above, you can introduce some complexity through repeated notes, thus attaining a more accurate pitch.

8

Ar S S I R R I G G I M M I P P I D D I N N I S S
Av S S I N N I D D I P P I M M I G G I R R I S S

9

Ar
S S S I R R R I G G G I M M M
P P P I D D D I N N N I S S S

Av
S S S I N N N I D D D I P P P
M M M I G G G I R R R I S S S

10

Ar
S S S S I R R R R I G G G G
M M M I P P P P I D D D D
N N N N I S S S S

Av
S S S S I N N N N I D D D D
P P P P I M M M M I G G G G
R R R R I S S S S



Melodic Paltas

Once you have mastered your middle octave and you can precisely sing the correct Shuddha notes, you can take up more intricate and expressive exercises. These paltas help in understanding the melodic structures and practice different possible combinations of notes in the standard major scale.

11

Ar

SRMG, RGPM, GMDP
MPND, PDSN, DNR S

Av

SNPD, NDMP, DPGM
PMRG, MGSR, GRNS

12

Ar

SSRG, SRRG, SRGG
RRGM, RGGM, RGMM
GGMP, GMMP, GMPP
MMPD, MPPD, MPDD
PPDN, PDDN, PDNN
DDNS, DNN S, DN S S

Av

SSND, SNND, SNDD
NNDP, NDDP, NDPP
DDPM, DPPM, DPMM
PPMG, PMMG, PMGG
MMGR, MGGR, MGRR
GGRS, GRRS, GRSS

Melodic Paltas

13

Ar

SR
SRGR
SRGMGR
SRGMPMGR
SRGMPDPMGR
SRGMPDNDPMGR
SRGMPDNS

Av

ṠN
ṠNDN
ṠNDPDN
ṠNDPMPDN
ṠNDPMGMPDN
ṠNDPMGRGMPDN
ṠNDPMGRS

Ar

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4				
SR	SR	GR	SR	GM	GR	SR	GM				
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4				
PM	GR	SR	GM	PD	PM	GR	SR				
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
GM	PD	ND	PM	GR	SR	GM	PD	NS			

Av

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4				
ṠN	ṠN	DN	ṠN	DP	DN	ṠN	DP				
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4				
MP	DN	ṠN	DP	MG	MP	DN	ṠN				
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
DP	MG	RG	MP	DN	ṠN	DP	MG	RS			

Melodic Paltas

14

Ar

GRS, MGR, PMG, DPM,
NDP, SND, RSN, GRS

Av

DNŠ, PDN, MPD, GMP,
RGM, SRG, NSR, DNS

15

Ar

GGRS, MMGR, PPMG,
DDPM, NNDP, ŠŠND,
ŘŘSN, ĞĞRS

Av

DDNŠ, PPDN, MMPD,
GGMP, RRGM, SSRG,
NNSR, DDNS

16

Ar

GGRG, MMGM, PPMP
DDPD, NNDN, ŠŠNS

Av

DDND, PPDP, MMPM
GGMG, RRGR, SSRS

17

Ar

SGPG, RMDM, GPNP
MDSD, PNRN, DSGS

Av

ŠDMD, NPGP, DMRM
PGSG, MRNR, GSDS



Intermediate Paltas

After mastering basic and smaller phrases, you can add more complexity and explore more possible combinations of notes. Always move to the next set of exercises when you are confident about the previous parts. Start with a lower tempo while focussing on the accuracy first, and then gradually increase the speed.

18

Ar

SRSR RSRS

RGRG GRGR

GMGM MGGM

MPMP PMPM

PDPD DPDP

DNDN NDND

ṢṢṢṢ ṢṢṢṢ

ṢṢṢṢ ṢṢṢṢ

Av

ṢṢṢṢ ṢṢṢṢ

NDND DNDN

DPDP PDPD

PMMP MPMP

MGGM GMGM

GRGR RGRG

RSRS SRSR

ṢṢṢṢ ṢṢṢṢ

Intermediate Paltas

19

Ar

SRG ŠND

RGM NDP

GMP DPM

MPD PMG

PDN MGR

DNṠ GRS

Av

ŠND SRG

NDP RGM

DPM GMP

PMG MPD

MGR PDN

GRS DNS

20

Ar

SRMP ŠNDP

RGMP NDPM

GMPD DPMG

MPDN PMGR

PDNS MGRS

Av

ŠNDP SRGM

NDPM RGMP

DPMG GMPD

PMGR MPDN

MGRS PDNṠ

Intermediate Paltas

21

Ar

SRGM SR SG SM

RGMP RG RM RP

GMPD GM GP GD

MPDN MP MD MN

PDNṠ PD PN ṖS

Av

ṠNDP ṠN ṠD ṠP

NDPM ND NP NM

DPMG DP DM DG

PMGR PM PG PR

MGRS MG MR MS

22

Ar

SR SG SM SP SD SN ṠS

Av

ṠN ṠD ṠP ṠM ṠG ṠR ṠS

Once you have thoroughly worked through the exercises in the previous pages, you should attempt to memorize the notes in each palta and increase the tempo before advancing to the next exercises.



Advanced Paltas

23

Ar

S_.N_.S_.R_.S_.N_.R_.S_.
R_.S_.R_.G_.R_.S_.G_.R_.
G_.R_.G_.M_.G_.R_.M_.G_.
M_.G_.M_.P_.M_.G_.P_.M_.
P_.M_.P_.D_.P_.M_.D_.P_.
D_.P_.D_.N_.D_.P_.N_.D_.
N_.D_.N_.S_.N_.D_.S_.N_.
S_.N_.S_.R_.S_.N_.R_.S_.

Av

S_.R_.S_.N_.S_.R_.N_.S_.
N_.S_.N_.D_.N_.S_.D_.N_.
D_.N_.D_.P_.D_.N_.P_.D_.
P_.D_.P_.M_.P_.D_.M_.P_.
M_.P_.M_.G_.M_.P_.G_.M_.
G_.M_.G_.R_.G_.M_.R_.G_.
R_.G_.R_.S_.R_.G_.S_.R_.
S_.R_.S_.N_.S_.R_.N_.S_.

24

Ar

S_.R_. G_.R_.S_.G_.R_.S_.
R_.G_. M_.G_.R_.M_.G_.R_.
G_.M_. P_.M_.G_.P_.M_.G_.
M_.P_. D_.P_.M_.D_.P_.M_.
P_.D_. N_.D_.P_.N_.D_.P_.
D_.N_. S_.N_.D_.S_.N_.D_.
N_.S_. R_.S_.N_.R_.S_.N_.
S_.R_. G_.R_.S_.G_.R_.S_.

Av

S_.N_. D_.N_.S_.D_.N_.S_.
N_.D_. P_.D_.N_.P_.D_.N_.
D_.P_. M_.P_.D_.M_.P_.D_.
P_.M_. G_.M_.P_.G_.M_.P_.
M_.G_. R_.G_.M_.R_.G_.M_.
G_.R_. S_.R_.G_.S_.R_.G_.
R_.S_. N_.S_.R_.N_.S_.R_.
S_.N_. D_.N_.S_.D_.N_.S_.

Advanced Paltas

25

Ar

SRGMGR	RGMPMG	GMPDPM	MPDNDP
SSRGMR	RRGMPG	GGMPDM	MMPDNP
SSRGMS	RRGMPR	GGMPDG	MMPDNM
PDNSND	DNSRSN	NNŠRĠS	SRGMGR
PPDNSD	DDNSRN	NNŠRĠN	SSRGMR
PPDNSP	DDNSRD	NNŠRĠN	SSRGMS

Av

ŠNDPDN	NDPMPD	DPMGMP	PMGRGM
ŠŠNDPN	NNDPMD	DDPMGP	PPMGRM
ŠŠNDPŠ	NNDPMN	DDPMGD	PPMGRP
MGRSRG	GRS _· NR	RS _· ND _· NS _·	S _· ND _· P _· D _· N _·
MMGRSG	GGRS _· NR	RRS _· ND _· S _·	S _· S _· ND _· P _· N _·
MMGRSM	GGRS _· NG	RRS _· ND _· R	S _· S _· ND _· P _· S _·

Ar

SRGMP, SPMGRS
RGMPD, RDPMGR
GMPDN, GNDPMG
MPDNŚ, MŚNDPM
PDNŚŖ, PŖŚNDP
DNŚŖĠ, DĠŖŚND
NŚŖĠĠ, NĠŖŖŚN
ŚŖĠĠP, ŚPĠŖŖŚ

Av

ŚNDPM, ŚMPDNŚ
NDPMG, NGMPDN
DPMGR, DRGMPD
PMGRS, P SRGMP
MGRSN, MŖSRGM
GRSND, GDŖSRG
RSNDP, RPDŖSR
SNDPM, SMPDNŚ



Advanced Paltas

27

Ar

SRGMPGRS

RGMPDMGR

GMPDNPMG

MPDNŚDPM

PDNŚRNDP

DNSRĠŚND

NŚRĠMRŚN

ŚRĠMPGRŚ

Av

ŚNDPMDNŚ

NDPMGPDN

DPMGRMPD

PMGRSGMP

MGRSNRGP

GRSND SRG

RSNDPN SR

SNDPMDNS



Five and Return

In these exercises, you sing five notes in the same direction as aaroh or avroh and end with one of the notes in a row. In the following palta, you begin with 1, follow till 5, and return to 1. Then you begin with 2, continue till 6, and return back to 2. You can increase the complexity over time.

28

Ar

SRGMP S
RGMPDR
GMPDNG
MPDNŚM
PDNŚR P
DNŚRĠD
NŚRĠMN
ŚRĠMPS

Av

ŚNDPMŚ
NDPMGN
DPMGRD
PMGRSP
MGRSNM
GRSNĠG
RSNDPR
SNĠPM S



Five and Return

29

Ar

SRGMPR
RGMPDG
GMPDNM
MPDNŚP
PDNŚRD
DNŚRĠN
NŚRĠMŚ

Av

ŚNDPMN
NDPMGD
DPMGRP
PMGRSM
MGRSNG
GRSNDR
RSNDPS

30

Ar

SRGMPG
RGMPDM
GMPDNP
MPDNŚD
PDNŚRN
DNŚRĠŚ

Av

ŚNDPMD
NDPMGP
DPMGRM
PMGRSG
MGRSNR
GRSNDŚ

Five and Return

31

Ar

SRGMPPM

RGMPDP

GMPDND

MPDNŠN

PDNŠRŠ

Av

ŠNDPMP

NDPMGM

DPMGRG

PMGRSR

MGRSNŠ



Meru Khand

Meru Khand is a category of advanced exercises where you rehearse all the possible combinations of 2, 3, or 4 notes. Advanced practitioners can attempt more notes however it is preferable to master these exercises with smaller sets before moving to higher.

If you were to practice with a single note, you have only one possible set. If you select two notes, say, 1 and 2, you can practice 1-2 and 2-1. With three notes, you immediately have much more possibilities: 1-2-3, 1-3-2, 2-1-3, 2-3-1, 3-1-2, 3-2-1. It is a simple set obtained by obtaining all the possible combinations of n notes (mathematically, n -factorial notes).

Begin with two note combinations. Once you are able to accurately match the notes in a moderate tempo, move to three note combinations. Do not attempt the next level unless you have absolutely mastered the previous one.



Meru Khand

32

Palta Meru Khand with two note combinations

Ar SR RS, RG GR, GM MG, MP PM
PD DP, DN ND, N[˙]S S[˙]N, S[˙]R R[˙]S[˙]

Av S[˙]N N[˙]S, ND DN, DP PD, PM MP
MG GM, GR RG, RS SR, S[˙]N[˙] N[˙]S[˙]

33

Palta Meru Khand with three note combinations

SRG	SGR	SRS	S [˙] ND	S [˙] DN	S [˙] NS
RGM	RMG	RGR	NDP	NPD	NDN
GMP	GPM	GMG	DPM	DMP	DPD
MPD	MDP	MPM	PMG	PGM	PMP
PDN	PND	PDP	MGR	MRG	MGM
DNS	D [˙] SN	DND	GRS	GSR	GRG
N [˙] S [˙] R	N [˙] R [˙] S	N [˙] S [˙] N	R [˙] S [˙] N [˙]	R [˙] N [˙] S [˙]	RSR
S [˙] R [˙] G	S [˙] G [˙] R	S [˙] R [˙] S [˙]	S [˙] N [˙] D	S [˙] D [˙] N	S [˙] N [˙] S

Meru Khand

Practice four note meru khand by emphasizing the subtle tonal difference in every four note phrase. Initially, set the tempo very low and practice only one row at a time.

Gradually add the next row over multiple practice sessions. Increase the tempo only if you are confident with lower tempos.

34

Palta Meru Khand with four note combinations

Ar

SRGM, SGRM, RSGM, GSRM, GRSM, RGSM
RGMP, RMGP, GRMP, MRGP, MGRP, GMRP
GMPD, GPMD, MGPD, PGMD, PMGD, MPGD
MPDN, MDPN, PMDN, DMPN, DPMN, PDMN
PDNS, PNDŚ, DPNSŚ, NPDŚ, NDPŚ, DNPS

Av

ŚNDP, ŚDNP, NŚDP, DŚNP, DNŚP, NDŚP
NDPM, NPDM, DNPM, PNDM, PDNM, DPNM
DPMG, DMPG, PDMG, MDPG, MPDG, PMDG
PMGR, PGMR, MPGR, GPMR, GMPR, MGPR
MGRS, MRGS, GMRS, RMGS, RGMS, GRMS

Further Steps

A structured practice routine is crucial for steady progress and mastery in Indian classical music. Consistency in musical practice ensures gradual and sustained improvement in technique, expression, and understanding of the art form.

Do not underestimate the importance of having a regular practicing routine in a preferred location optimized for you learning. Choosing a quiet, comfortable location for your practice is essential to minimize distractions and maximize focus. Use a tanpura. If you can't find a tanpura or a shruti box, use high quality sounds such as those available on my YouTube channel, enhance the harmonic richness and create a conducive practice atmosphere. Ensure you have necessary tools such as a notepad for jotting down insights, a recording device to track your progress, a metronome for rhythm practice, and useful apps for additional support—all of which are discussed in detail on my channel.



Further Steps

If you started learning by yourself, find a mentor or a teacher, or a knowledgeable friend who can provide personalized feedback, helping you identify and correct mistakes that you might not notice on your own. They can also introduce you to advanced techniques and ragas, offering insights into the finer nuances of performance.

Regular lessons with a mentor ensure that you remain motivated and on the right track, as they can tailor their instruction to your specific needs and progress level. Implementing feedback into your routine involves consciously integrating the corrections and suggestions provided by your teacher, making them a part of your daily practice until they become second nature.

Always consider the source of the advice and prioritize input from credible and experienced musicians. When in doubt, consult your primary teacher for clarification.



Further Steps

The importance of a dedicated teacher cannot be emphasized enough — they provide structure, expertise, and inspiration, guiding you towards becoming a proficient and expressive musician.

Above all, remain curious and open to new experiences. Anyone can learn and excel in music with dedication and the right guidance. Regularly listening to recordings of great musicians not only provides inspiration but also deepens your understanding of different styles and techniques. Keep practicing, stay motivated, and continue exploring the vast and beautiful world of Indian classical music.





For more resources and tutorials, please visit:

www.deepayanmajumder.com

Tanpura Sounds for different scales:

A www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J858wG6IN8

A# www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Z_qjF7fVsw

C www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0Y0wHvjdAk

C# www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVuIit2lCqE

D www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8FUO_rzQ4w

G www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS1tVFkMaOU

Youtube Tutorials:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYsYm0lla20





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