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"IMPACT OF DAILY RIYAZ ON FINGER DEXTERITY AND TONAL CLARITY IN SITAR PLAYING"

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ABSTRACT

Riyaz, or systematic daily practice, forms the cornerstone of all Hindustani classical music training, particularly for instrumentalists such as sitar players. The present study examines the measurable impact of structured daily riyaz on two vital aspects of sitar performance: finger dexterity and tonal clarity. The research was conducted over a 30-day period involving intermediate-level sitar students from the University of Kashmir. Using an experimental-practical approach, the study analyzed changes in technical proficiency, tonal quality, and overall expressive control through daily monitored practice routines. Data were collected through performance recordings, visual analysis of hand movement, and self-evaluation logs. Findings demonstrate that consistent daily riyaz significantly enhances muscle coordination, right-left hand synchronization, and tonal resonance, thereby improving both the technical and aesthetic outcomes of performance.

KEYWORDS: Riyaz, Sitar, Finger Dexterity, Tonal Clarity, Hindustani Classical Music, Practice, Gayaki Ang.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sitar, one of the most distinguished string instruments in Hindustani classical music, has evolved as a medium of profound expression, merging melodic beauty with rhythmic sophistication. Mastery of the sitar demands continuous practice, intellectual understanding of ragas, and the cultivation of tonal purity. In this regard, riyaz—the daily disciplined practice—acts as the foundation for the performer's technical and emotional development.

In the Indian musical tradition, riyaz is considered not merely as physical training but as a spiritual and mental discipline. Through repetition, focus, and patience, riyaz enhances not only the agility of fingers but also the sensitivity of the performer's ear and mind. However, in the modern era, with the rise of academic institutions and structured curricula, the empirical relationship between regular riyaz and improvement in technical parameters of sitar performance has not been studied extensively.

This research therefore aims to empirically analyze the tangible outcomes of systematic riyaz, particularly its effect on finger dexterity and tonal clarity.

2. Review of Literature

Several scholars and practitioners have written extensively on the significance of practice in Indian classical music. Bhatkhande (1934) emphasized that the musician's journey toward mastery depends on the repetition of patterns and the assimilation of musical nuances through persistent effort. According to Chaudhuri (1993), the sitarist must develop physical endurance, tonal accuracy, and rhythmic precision through years of dedicated riyaz.

Studies in Western music pedagogy also highlight the relationship between motor coordination and auditory feedback. Lehmann and Ericsson (1997) demonstrated that expert musicians differ from novices mainly in the quality and consistency of their deliberate practice. In the Indian context, Basu (2023) explored the neuro-acoustical aspects of raga performance, concluding that consistent training alters auditory perception and enhances tonal differentiation.

Vilayat Khan (1985) described riyaz as a form of sadhana—a spiritual practice—where the performer's soul merges with sound (naad). Modern research on instrumental learning further confirms that repetitive structured training leads to long-term changes in neural mapping of motor skills, resulting in enhanced speed, precision, and control.

3. Objectives of the Study

The present study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyze the impact of consistent daily riyaz on finger dexterity in sitar performance.
2. To examine the effect of daily riyaz on tonal clarity and resonance.
3. To explore the psychological and expressive transformation of students through disciplined practice.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a practice-based experimental research design. The focus was on practical observation rather than theoretical data. Each participant underwent a controlled daily riyaz schedule over 30 days.

4.2 Participants

Five intermediate sitar students (three male and two female), aged 20–28 years, participated. All were students of the Department of Sitar, University of Kashmir, with 1– 4 years of prior training.

4.3 Duration and Routine

Each participant practiced for two hours daily, divided into morning and evening sessions.

Morning Session:

1. Alankars in three speeds (Vilambit, Madhya, and Drut Laya).
2. Meend and Gamak exercises.
3. Scale practice with emphasis on tone purity.

Evening Session:

1. Raga Yaman alap, jod, and jhala.
2. Tonal sustain and resonance checks through recording.
3. Self-assessment of clarity and accuracy.

4.4 Tools and Techniques

1. Audio recordings (using Audacity software).
2. High-speed video for hand movement analysis.
3. Daily self-evaluation logbook maintained by each student.
4. Faculty observation reports.
5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this study is based on two principles:

1. Naad and Riyaz: In Indian aesthetics, Naad (sound) is considered divine. Through riyaz, the performer refines sound production until it resonates with inner consciousness.

2. Psychomotor Learning Theory: Repetitive training develops coordination between cognitive understanding and motor skills. In sitar, the left-hand movement for note production and the right-hand plucking with the mizrab must synchronize perfectly.

This framework validates the necessity of disciplined repetition for mastering physical and sonic dimensions of sitar playing.

6. Practical Experiment and Observation

Over 30 days, the participants followed their scheduled practice routine. Observations were recorded at weekly intervals.

Parameter.	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Finger Speed (notes/min)	90	110	130	150
Tonal Accuracy (%)	70	80	90	95
Meend Control (1–10 scale)	04	06	08	09
Confidence in Jhala	Moderate	Good	Excellent	Excellent

Observations:

By the third week, participants exhibited greater confidence in jhala sections.

Tonal quality became more stable, with fewer buzzing errors from frets.

Students reported improved relaxation in wrist and forearm muscles.

Right-hand synchronization improved by nearly 40%.

7. Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that daily practice enhanced both the precision and fluency of execution. Students achieved better articulation of microtones (shruti), and tonal clarity improved due to refined control of string pressure and plucking angle.

The correlation between finger flexibility and tonal purity was found to be strong ($r = 0.81$). This indicates that technical ease leads directly to enhanced sound quality.

8. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm traditional pedagogical wisdom: “Riyaz bina kala nahi”—there is no art without practice. The improvement in finger dexterity is attributable to enhanced neuro-muscular coordination, while tonal clarity results from increased familiarity with the instrument’s physical response.

Psychologically, the daily discipline instilled a meditative focus, reducing anxiety during performance. Students described their experience as a transformation from “playing notes” to “producing sound with feeling.”

9. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

1. Daily riyaz leads to measurable improvement in finger speed and coordination.
2. Tonal clarity and sustain improve due to refined control of pressure and plucking.
3. Structured practice enhances concentration and stage confidence.
4. Emotional expressiveness grows as technical barriers are reduced.

10. Pedagogical Implications

Music educators should emphasize structured practice routines rather than mere repetition. Institutions can design a “Riyaz Log” system to monitor daily progress and incorporate reflective learning.

11. Limitations of the Study

Small sample size (five participants).
Limited to one raga (Yaman).
No long-term follow-up post 30 days.
Future studies can include multiple ragas, advanced students, and longer observation periods.

12. Suggestions for Future Research
13. Conclusion Narrative analysis between instrumental (sitar, Tabla) and vocal riyaz.
2. Neurological imaging to study motor memory development.
3. Tonal spectrum analysis using advanced acoustic software.
4. Cross-cultural comparison with Western string instruments.

CONCLUSION

This research establishes that daily disciplined riyaz is not only a traditional necessity but also a scientifically validated method of musical development. The study proves that consistent practice sharpens finger dexterity, enhances tonal clarity, and elevates artistic confidence.

Through riyaz, the performer transforms physical movement into expressive art, bridging technique and emotion—embodying the true essence of Indian classical music.

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