

Voice Culture for an 'Ideal Voice'

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Abstract: *The article explores the importance and benefits of Voice Culture for a Vocalist. The process of improving, culturing and moulding a voice to enrich it is Voice culture. It also encompasses the series of procedures adopted to get a good control over one's voice. This study is an analysis of the characteristic features of an Ideal Voice and a few techniques of Voice culture to make the voice Ideal. The procedure and techniques employed in this study can be used by students of Vocal Music, to improve their Voice Quality and become a better singer.*

Keywords: Voice, Voice culture, techniques, benefits

1. Introduction

"The Human Voice is the most perfect instrument of all", says Mr. Arvo Part (an Estonian composer of classical and religious music). "The Human Voice is the organ of the soul", says Mr. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (an American poet). The sayings insist on the importance of a Voice. For singers, Voice is the medium to communicate their 'Sangeetha Gnana' to the audience. Therefore it is very important for every singer to maintain a cultured voice. Voice Culture not only improves the Voice Quality, but intensifies the connectivity between the singer and the audience.

2. Characters of an Ideal Voice

A good singing voice must sound sweet and it is the responsibility of a singer to avoid grating. It should be graceful and not a forceful music. Another important aspect of a good voice is that it must be clear.

Breathing plays a significant role in singing. A singer inhales and exhales through mouth while singing and should know how to slowly exhale the inhaled breath.

Clarity and precision of each and every note sung by a singer is a very essential factor. 'Gamakas' or 'tonal ornaments' are the integral part of Indian Classical Music (Carnatic or Hindustani). Voice control and clarity of notes while singing Gamakas is indispensable.

2.1 Types of Voices

Singing voice may be broadly classified into 4 types:

2.1.1 Chest Voice: It is the basement for a good singing voice. It has to be strong enough to develop the other two voices.

2.1.2 Head Voice: This voice is used to sing higher octaves where chest voice cannot reach. It is less stronger than then Chest voice.

2.1.3 Falsetto: While singing much higher octaves, a singer uses the Falsetto. It is a very weak and a thin voice.

2.1.4 Nasal Voice: A nasal voice is a type of speaking voice characterized by speech with a "nasal" quality. It can also occur naturally because of genetic variation [1].

2.2 Other essentials of an Ideal Voice

- A good range of voice which could reach 3 octaves completely or at least two and a half octaves without strain.
- The volume and resonance should be the same while singing lower, middle and higher octaves.
- Open throat singing is always recommended in Indian Classical Music (Carnatic and Hindustani).
- Shift of voices from chest to head or nasal or a mix should not be obvious. It should be mild and under the control of the singer, so that the listeners cannot differentiate it.
- Voice is the medium to express what you feel. Therefore the mood and the meaning and of the song must be absorbed completely by the singer in order to modulate one's voice with appropriate dynamics. Such dynamics must be applied using voice levels and volumes, keeping the raga aesthetics in mind.
- There should be a good flow between the octaves without any break.
- Sustain a particular note without wobbling is a very beautiful aspect in Indian Classical Music. A singer should be aware of where to sustain more and when to cut short a phrase.
- Right sound, Right volume, Right push and right oscillation are the key factors to an Ideal voice.
- A singer's mind must control the voice. There must be a proper communication between the mind and the voice.

3. What should be eschewed while singing?

- Throatiness (double tone sounding)
- Huskiness, unsteadiness and wobbling
- Lack of clarity
- Improper resonance
- Nasality and dryness
- Voice fatigue
- Inhaling while singing with a sound
- Pushing the voice while singing lower octaves
- Misuse, abuse or overuse of voice

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4. Voice Culture and its Benefits

There are basically two types of vocal disorders namely Functional and Organic. The former is due to wrong methods of practice, while the latter comprises other defects such as nodules which can be rectified with the help of an ENT consultant.

A voice which is set naturally cannot be changed altogether, but can be improved and moulded to make it sound good by practicing certain techniques as a part of Voice culture. A few of the Functional Disorders and their remedies are explained below.

4.1 Breathing

All singing begins with breath. All vocal sounds are created by vibrations in the larynx caused by air from the lungs. Breathing in everyday life is a subconscious bodily function which occurs naturally, however the singer must have control of the intake and exhalation of breath to achieve maximum results from their voice [2].

The prime breathing exercise is to sustain in one Swara or note for a long time without oscillating. The sustain must be stopped once it begins to wobble and restart again. This exercise may be started with 5 seconds for beginners which can be extended to 16 seconds or more. The important factor to be noted in this exercise is the 'controlled exhale of breath'.

4.2 Throatiness

Throatiness is the problem where we can hear two tones from a single voice. It can be rectified by a 'Humming Practice'. This method includes singing of Swara sthanas (placements) by closing your mouth. This technique has been proved successful by experiments conducted with Spectrogram by Dr. S. A. Kumari Durga (Musicologist and Ethnomusicologist).

4.3 Nasality

There are two palates in the mouth.

- Soft
- Hard

If the soft palate blocks the passage, then the tone becomes nasal. So it becomes necessary to lift the soft palate. This can be achieved by a technique called 'Closed mouth Yawn'. In this technique the singers have to yawn repeatedly by closing the mouth, where the lifting of the soft palate can be felt by them.

4.4 Phlegm in throat

We have heard a lot about phlegm in the lungs. But the problem of Throat Mucus or Throat Phlegm is a type of disorder, which exists only in the morning for many singers. This phlegm causes throat congestion and shortness of breath. We can find many singers clearing their throats while singing. Such act may be a temporary relief for the singers on stage but the vocal chords are strained by this.

This problem can be overcome by two methods :

- Practicing Manthra Sthayi or the Lower Octaves in the morning
- Intake of at least 10 glasses of water everyday

4.5 Voice Change during Mutation Period

A voice change or voice mutation, sometimes referred to as a voice break, commonly refers to the deepening of the voice of people as they reach puberty [3].

Such a change may not be much for the females. In case of the male vocal chords, the length of the vocal chords increases up to 25mm. This growth affects the 'Shruthi' or 'Pitch' for boys, which leads to a crack in their voice when they sing higher octaves.

The solution to this problem is 'Humming Practice' and a gradual 'Sadhagam' or Practice to sing higher octaves. The resonance must be felt in the cheeks and not in the jaws or any other spot during Humming Practice.

4.6 Range problems

For the singers who do not have a good range of voice (at least 2 ½ octaves as already explained), they have an exercise named 'Movable Do or Sa Exercise'. This exercise may be explained as (Higher octave in *italics*):

Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa
Ri Ga Ma Pa dha Ni Sa Ri

This exercise enables the singer to reach higher ranges with ease.

4.7 Other Voice Culture Techniques

Practicing all the swaras or notes with the sound of vowels-Aa, Ee, Oo and Oa is a very important voice culture technique, which aids in singing Akaras during Raga Alapana and Manodharma Sangeetham. This Vowel Practice must be done with a vibration in the tongue and not by moving the lips.

Sometimes due to the anxiety of a singer, before performing, the facial muscles may tighten. Lower Jaw is the moving part when we sing or talk. So when the lower jaw, tongue or neck muscles get tensed vocal chords do not vibrate properly. There are a few warm up exercises to relax these muscles.

Turn the head from left to right and vice versa (like nodding) to relax the neck muscles. Jaws can be relaxed by opening and closing the mouth and tongue can be relaxed by moving the tongue in various directions with the mouth closed.

5. Conclusion

Voice culture is a science that involves scientific methods with traditional methods to make a voice sound good. It comprises different subjects like anatomy of vocal chords, physiology of sound production, physics of singing, aspects

of acoustics and Yoga. A few of these have been analyzed and explained in this article.

References

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Author Profile



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