

Learning the systems

“This sounds like industrial engineering,” a student once said — referring to the importance given to precision and efficiency of slides, finger movements, and phrasing. This eliminates guess work and looking for talent, instead makes at least the initial stages of learning and playing, a manageable physical activity similar to typing.

Students hint about my engineering background (IIT Madras) and how our approach borrows from standard operating procedures and engineering principles.

Raga Kanada - Dorian Finger Planning

To not run out of fingers to play, we start with the ring finger (3/8 slide). Then the middle (6\3 slide). So that we have the 1st finger free to play the next part (1/6 slide).

The image displays musical notation for Raga Kanada in Dorian mode. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat), showing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, showing a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is a text line with the lyrics 'aa nanda mo ha na | ve nu gaa na ma dil'. Above the text, finger numbers are written: '3 8 8 8 6 3 3 3' for the first phrase and '1 6 8 6 4 6 7 5' for the second phrase. A vertical dashed line separates the two phrases. Below the text, the words 'Finger', 'Ring', 'Middle', and 'Index' are written, corresponding to the finger numbers. The word 'gaa' in the lyrics is highlighted in light blue.

Do such preemptive planning that will make your playing easier. Phrasing and finger logic is the one thing I have seen masters spend a lot of time. They want to remove all bottle necks, remove the need for thinking and struggling, especially when preparing to play on stage.

Also, if you are just beginning, simpler versions of such songs are available so that you can focus on a doable version while practising the underlying skills. Later iterate to add embellishments, instead of trying to do too many things. Challenging but not overwhelming.

Focus Chunk Skill

I learned Carnatic vocal from multiple teachers since I was a child, continuing into my 20s. I transcribed vocal music to standard-tuned guitar, with help from teachers who corrected my basics and by watching and learning from exceptional senior guitar players who were patient enough to guide me.

The emphasis on layers and chunks of tasks, processes, error oriented practice with focus on underlying skills, helps you cut through the clutter and make fast, sure progress.

Here, I share some practical aspects of playing Indian music on guitar. I hope they help you find something meaningful in your own journey.

By comparing the scale patterns usually played on the guitar to the Indian Raga equivalents we can learn the necessary raga slides we need to add to get the final Indian sound. We will be covering them in detail in this book starting with the coming section.