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From Oral To Institutional Learning: Changing Modes Of Mridangam Education

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Abstract: The pedagogy of the Mridangam, a central percussion instrument in Carnatic music, has undergone significant transformation over time. Traditionally transmitted through the *guru–shishya Parampara*, Mridangam learning emphasized oral transmission, embodied practice, and immersive apprenticeship. However, with the advent of institutional frameworks such as music colleges, universities, and digital platforms, pedagogical modes have shifted toward structured curricula, notation-based learning, and standardized evaluation systems. This paper examines the transition from oral to institutional learning, analyzing its implications on knowledge transmission, creativity, discipline, and cultural continuity. By situating this shift within broader socio-cultural and technological changes, the study argues that while institutionalization democratizes access, it also risks diluting the experiential depth of traditional pedagogy. The paper proposes a hybrid pedagogical model that integrates the strengths of both systems.

Index Terms - Mridangam, Guru–Shishya Parampara, Oral Tradition, Institutional Learning, Pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mridangam occupies a central and indispensable position within the framework of Carnatic music, not merely as a percussive accompaniment but as an active and dynamic participant in the musical dialogue. Mridangam also plays an important role in the Classical Dance practice and performance specifically in Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, and Mohiniattam. Its role extends beyond maintaining rhythm; it engages in a sophisticated interplay with melodic performers, shaping the aesthetic and structural contours of a performance. Traditionally, the transmission of Mridangam knowledge was deeply embedded in the *guru–shishya parampara*, an oral and experiential mode of pedagogy that emphasized close personal mentorship. Within this system, learning was not confined to formal instruction but unfolded through prolonged immersion, observation, repetition, and gradual internalization. The student absorbed both technical proficiency and artistic sensibility through sustained interaction with the guru, often in an environment that integrated daily life with disciplined practice. Such a model fostered an intuitive understanding of rhythm, tone, and improvisation, which are essential to the expressive depth of Mridangam performance.

In recent decades, however, this traditional mode of transmission has undergone significant transformation due to the emergence of institutionalized learning environments. Universities, music colleges, and academies have increasingly incorporated Mridangam into structured curricula, supported by standardized syllabi, written notation, graded examinations, and formal certification. Additionally, digital platforms and online learning tools have further expanded access to Mridangam education, transcending geographical limitations and enabling new forms of engagement. This shift reflects broader socio-cultural processes such as modernization, urbanization, and the increasing professionalization and democratization of the performing arts. As artistic practices move into formal academic spaces, they are reconfigured to align with institutional requirements of assessment, documentation, and scalability.

The transition from oral to institutional pedagogy raises critical questions regarding the nature and quality of knowledge transmission in Mridangam education. Oral pedagogy, rooted in lived experience and embodied practice, privileges intuition, improvisation, and the gradual cultivation of individual style. It also helps students in having a strong bond with the teacher and would also further in the teacher backing the student with performance opportunities and also making him/her a part of the Parampara that our Sanatana Dharma truly is. In contrast, institutional learning often prioritizes structured progression, measurable outcomes, and theoretical articulation. It also makes the art form available to students of different geographical areas have an opportunity to learn this instrument which is sometimes not possible in small towns and villages of India. Another advantage with the institutionalization is that, as it is offered as a part of curriculum, students need not compromise on their otherwise conventional education to learn the instrument which would usually happen when the students learn the instruments under a personal teacher in the Guru Shishya Parampara.

While Institutionalization enhances accessibility and provides legitimacy within academic frameworks, it may also risk fragmenting what was once a holistic and immersive learning process. The shift thus necessitates a careful examination of how these differing pedagogical approaches shape not only technical competence but also artistic identity and creativity.

Furthermore, the process of institutionalization brings with it both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it democratizes access to Mridangam training, enabling students from diverse social and geographical backgrounds to engage with the art form. It also facilitates documentation, research, and critical inquiry, thereby contributing to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. On the other hand, the standardization inherent in institutional systems can potentially constrain improvisational freedom and reduce the depth of guru–student interaction. The question, therefore, is not merely one of replacement but of balance: how to integrate the strengths of both systems without diminishing the essence of either. In this context, the present study seeks to critically examine the evolving landscape of Mridangam pedagogy by addressing three key questions:

1. How oral and institutional modes of learning differ in their methods and outcomes?
2. What gains and losses accompany the process of institutionalization?
3. Whether a synthesized or hybrid model can offer a more sustainable and holistic approach to teaching and learning?

By situating this inquiry within broader cultural and educational transformations, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on the future of traditional arts in contemporary academic and global contexts.

II. Historical Background of Mridangam Pedagogy

The traditional pedagogy of Mridangam was deeply rooted in hereditary and lineage-based systems. Students often lived with their Guru, observing and absorbing not only musical techniques but also values, discipline, and aesthetics. One of the most distinctive features of oral tradition in Mridangam pedagogy is the emphasis on embodied knowledge, where learning occurs through sustained physical engagement with the instrument rather than through abstract instruction. Students acquire skills by closely observing the guru, repeatedly practicing patterns, and internalizing rhythmic structures through listening and imitation. This process allows the body itself to become a repository of knowledge, where hand movements, tonal control, and rhythmic precision are ingrained through muscle memory. Unlike text-based learning, where information is externalized, embodied learning ensures that knowledge is lived and experienced, enabling the student to respond intuitively during performance. Closely connected to this is the practice of *konnakol* training, which forms the backbone of rhythmic education in the Mridangam tradition. *Konnakol* involves the vocal articulation of rhythmic syllables, allowing students to conceptualize complex rhythmic patterns before translating them onto the instrument. This method not only sharpens the learner's sense of timing and structure but also bridges the gap between cognition and execution. By vocalizing patterns, students develop an internal rhythmic consciousness that guides their playing, making performance more precise and expressive. *Konnakol* thus serves as both a pedagogical tool and a performative art, reinforcing the deep interconnection between voice, body, and instrument. Another defining aspect of oral pedagogy is personalized instruction, which is inherently adaptive to the individual learner. In the *guru-shishya Parampara*, teaching is not standardized but evolves according to the student's abilities, temperament, and pace of learning. The guru carefully observes the student's progress and introduces lessons in a manner that nurtures both technical competence and creative confidence. This individualized attention enables a more nuanced development of skill, as the teaching process can accommodate strengths, address weaknesses, and encourage experimentation. Such flexibility is often absent in institutional systems, where uniform curricula may not fully account for individual differences. Finally, oral tradition relies heavily on the transmission of tacit knowledge, which encompasses subtle aspects of Mridangam playing that are rarely articulated in explicit terms. Elements such as tonal variation, pressure control, improvisational flow, and aesthetic judgment are conveyed indirectly through demonstration, correction, and shared performance experiences. The student learns to perceive and reproduce these nuances by prolonged exposure rather than through verbal explanation. This implicit mode of transmission fosters a deeper sensitivity to sound and rhythm, allowing the learner to develop a distinctive artistic voice. However, because such knowledge is not formally codified, it remains difficult to document or standardize, highlighting both the richness and the vulnerability of oral pedagogical systems. This method always

ensured that knowledge was not merely intellectual but deeply internalized, fostering a holistic artistic identity.

This guru–shishya model is not merely pedagogical but philosophical. It involves surrender, discipline, and a deep emotional bond between teacher and student. A defining feature of the *guru–shishya Parampara* is its emphasis on long-term commitment, where the process of learning extends over several years, and in many cases, even decades. Unlike institutional systems that are bound by semesters or fixed durations, this model allows for sustained and continuous engagement between the guru and the disciple. The student does not merely learn techniques in isolation but gradually matures within the tradition through prolonged practice, observation, and participation in performances. This extended timeframe enables the deep internalization of complex rhythmic patterns and aesthetic principles, ensuring that knowledge is not acquired superficially but becomes an integral part of the learner’s artistic identity. Another significant aspect of this tradition is its focus on holistic development, where learning transcends technical training to include spiritual, ethical, and cultural dimensions. The guru imparts not only the mechanics of Mridangam playing but also values such as discipline, humility, devotion, and respect for the art form. The learning environment often integrates everyday life with artistic practice, fostering a sense of responsibility and reverence toward both the teacher and the tradition. In this way, the *guru–shishya Parampara* nurtures the student as a complete artist, shaping their character and worldview alongside their musical abilities. Equally important is the principle of non-linear learning, which distinguishes this system from structured educational models. Progress within the *guru–shishya Parampara* is not determined by predefined syllabi or timelines but by the student’s readiness to absorb and execute increasingly complex material. The guru introduces new lessons based on careful assessment of the disciple’s understanding, discipline, and maturity. This flexible approach allows for deeper comprehension and avoids the pressure of premature advancement. As a result, learning becomes a gradual and organic process, where mastery is achieved through patience, repetition, and sustained effort rather than through rapid completion of prescribed levels.

While the *guru–shishya Parampara* has been celebrated for its depth and intimacy, it has not been without its limitations. One of the most significant challenges associated with this system is its restricted accessibility, which historically limited who could participate in the learning process. Access to a reputed guru often depends on geographical proximity, making it difficult for students from distant regions to engage in sustained training. Additionally, social structures such as caste hierarchies and gender norms played a role in determining who could enter and thrive within these artistic lineages. Economic factors further compounded these barriers, as long-term, immersive training required both time and financial stability, which were not available to all aspiring learners. As a result, the transmission of knowledge remained confined to relatively narrow circles, restricting the broader dissemination of art form. Another limitation lies in the absence of formal recognition or certification within this traditional system. While the *guru–shishya Parampara* emphasized mastery and experiential learning, it did not provide standardized credentials that could be used for academic or professional advancement in modern contexts. In an increasingly institutionalized world, where degrees and certifications often determine

career opportunities, this lack of formal validation posed challenges for practitioners seeking employment in educational institutions or recognition within official cultural frameworks. Consequently, despite producing highly skilled artists, the traditional system sometimes struggled to align with contemporary structures that prioritize documented qualifications and measurable outcomes.

III. Emergence of Institutional Learning

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed a profound transformation in the modes of transmitting knowledge in the performing arts, including Mridangam. With the expansion of universities, music colleges, and cultural academies, learning has increasingly moved into institutional frameworks that emphasize organization, scalability, and formal recognition. This shift is closely linked to broader socio-cultural changes such as modernization, urbanization, and the growing need to integrate traditional arts into formal systems of education. As a result, Mridangam pedagogy, once primarily rooted in intimate and individualized oral traditions, has been reconfigured to align with academic structures that prioritize clarity, consistency, and accessibility. One of the defining features of institutional pedagogy is the presence of a structured curriculum, where learning is organized into clearly defined levels with sequential progression. Students are introduced to foundational exercises, basic rhythmic cycles, and simple compositions before gradually advancing to more complex patterns and performance techniques. This systematic approach ensures that learners acquire knowledge in a logical and cumulative manner, reducing ambiguity in the learning process. Unlike the open-ended nature of traditional training, the curriculum provides a roadmap that guides both teachers and students, making the process more predictable and manageable, especially in group learning environments. Another important aspect is the use of notation systems, which play a crucial role in documenting and transmitting rhythmic knowledge. In institutional settings, Mridangam compositions, exercises, and *korvais* are often represented through written symbols or syllabic frameworks. This allows students to visually engage with rhythmic structures, revisit lessons independently, and maintain records of their learning. Notation also facilitates standardization across institutions, ensuring that certain core elements of the tradition are preserved and consistently taught. However, while notation aids in clarity and documentation, it represents a shift from the purely aural mode of learning to a more text-supported approach. Institutional pedagogy also relies heavily on assessment methods, including examinations, grading systems, and formal certifications. Students are evaluated at regular intervals through practical performances, written tests, and viva voce examinations. These assessments provide measurable indicators of progress and help maintain academic accountability. Certifications and degrees, in turn, offer students formal recognition of their skills, which can be essential for pursuing careers in teaching, performance, or research. This evaluative framework distinguishes institutional learning from traditional systems, where progress was assessed informally and often subjectively by the guru. Another significant advantage of institutionalization is its emphasis on accessibility, which broadens the reach of Mridangam education across diverse socio-economic groups. Unlike the traditional model, which was often limited by geography and social structures, institutions create opportunities for students from varied backgrounds to engage with art form. Scholarships, public education systems, and online learning platforms further enhance inclusivity,

enabling individuals who might not have had access to a guru to receive formal training. This democratization of learning has contributed to the wider dissemination and sustainability of Mridangam as a performing art.

Overall, the shift toward institutional pedagogy reflects a broader need to standardize, document, and preserve knowledge in a rapidly changing world. As societies become more mobile and interconnected, traditional modes of transmission alone may not be sufficient to sustain complex art forms across generations. Institutional frameworks provide stability, continuity, and legitimacy, ensuring that Mridangam education can adapt to contemporary contexts while reaching a larger audience. At the same time, this transformation invites ongoing reflection on how to balance structure with creativity, and documentation with lived experience, so that the essence of the tradition is not lost in the process of modernization.

IV. Case Studies in Mridangam Pedagogy

Case Study 1: The Guru–Shishya Lineage Model (Traditional Training)

The training of legendary Mridangam artists such as Palghat Mani Iyer exemplifies the depth and rigor of the *guru–shishya Parampara*. Disciples under such lineage-based systems underwent years of immersive learning, often residing with the guru and engaging in continuous observation, practice, and performance accompaniment. The pedagogical process was largely oral, relying on *konnakol* (vocalization of rhythmic syllables), imitation, and gradual internalization of complex rhythmic structures. In this model, learning was non-linear and deeply personalized. A student's progress depended not on a predefined syllabus but on the guru's assessment of readiness. The emphasis was on developing *manodharma* (creative improvisation), tonal sensitivity, and an intuitive grasp of *laya* (tempo and rhythm). Importantly, knowledge transmission extended beyond technique to include performance ethics, stage aesthetics, and spiritual discipline. However, access to such training was often limited by factors such as proximity, social networks, and the guru's selective acceptance of disciples.

Case Study 2: Institutional Training in Indian Universities

In contrast, contemporary Mridangam education within institutions such as Banaras Hindu University or University of Madras reflects a structured and systematized approach. Students enroll in undergraduate or postgraduate programs where Mridangam is taught through a combination of practical sessions, theoretical coursework, and periodic assessments. Here, pedagogy is organized into graded levels, with clearly defined learning outcomes. Students are introduced to foundational exercises, *talas*, compositional forms, and accompaniment techniques within a fixed timeframe. Written notation and examination systems play a significant role, ensuring standardization and comparability across learners. While this model enhances accessibility and provides formal recognition, it often limits the duration and intensity of teacher–student interaction. As a result, the cultivation of improvisational depth and individualized style may be less pronounced compared to traditional systems.

Case Study 3: Hybrid Pedagogy in Institutional-Guru Interfaces

A compelling middle ground can be observed in institutions such as Kalakshetra Foundation and Kerala Kalamandalam, where elements of the *guru–shishya Parampara* are integrated into formal academic

structures. In these settings, students follow a curriculum but also engage in intensive, practice-oriented sessions with experienced gurus. This hybrid model allows for sustained mentorship while maintaining the organizational benefits of institutional frameworks. Students often participate in performances, workshops, and informal learning environments that mirror traditional modes of transmission. Such an approach fosters both technical proficiency and creative exploration, suggesting that the binary between oral and institutional learning can be productively bridged.

Case Study 4: Global/University-Based Training (Diasporic Context)

In international contexts, Mridangam pedagogy is frequently situated within ethnomusicology or world music programs. Students in universities abroad typically learn Mridangam as part of ensemble training, workshops, or elective courses. Unlike the immersive guru–shishya model, instruction here is often time-bound and modular, with an emphasis on exposure rather than mastery. This model plays a crucial role in the global dissemination of Carnatic percussion, enabling cross-cultural engagement and interdisciplinary research. However, the limited contact hours and absence of sustained mentorship can restrict deeper learning. Nevertheless, some diaspora artists attempt to recreate traditional pedagogical intensity through online one-on-one sessions, thereby blending global access with personalized instruction.

A comparative reading of the different pedagogical models through the case studies in Mridangam pedagogy reveals a broad and nuanced spectrum rather than a simple binary. Traditional systems rooted in oral transmission emphasize depth of learning, intuitive understanding, and the cultivation of a distinctive artistic voice. Students trained within this framework develop a strong sense of individuality, as their learning is shaped by prolonged engagement with a single guru and a highly personalized method of instruction. In contrast, institutional systems prioritize structure, accessibility, and formal recognition. By organizing knowledge into curricula and measurable outcomes, they make learning more systematic and inclusive, though sometimes at the cost of reducing the open-ended, exploratory nature of traditional training. Between these two poles, hybrid models attempt to reconcile the strengths of both approaches. Institutions that integrate elements of the *guru–shishya Parampara* within formal frameworks create spaces where rigorous practice coexists with structured learning. Such models allow students to benefit from individualized mentorship while also gaining access to academic resources and certification. At a global level, the spread of mridangam through international academic programs represents another layer of this spectrum. While these models play a crucial role in disseminating the art form beyond its cultural origins, they often lack the immersive depth and continuity that characterize traditional training. As a result, they tend to emphasize exposure and cross-cultural understanding rather than mastery.

These variations indicate that the transformation of mridangam pedagogy is not linear but layered and dynamic, shaped by intersecting cultural, institutional, and technological forces. The movement from oral to institutional modes does not signify a complete replacement of one system by another; rather, it reflects an ongoing process of adaptation. Each model responds to specific historical and social needs—whether it is the preservation of tradition, the expansion of access, or the globalization of knowledge. Consequently, no single approach can fully address all dimensions of mridangam education in the

contemporary context. A closer comparison between oral and institutional modes further highlights their fundamental differences in method and orientation. In oral tradition, learning is primarily based on listening, imitation, and repeated practice, allowing knowledge to be internalized through experience. The teacher–student relationship is deeply personal and immersive, often extending beyond formal instruction into everyday life. This creates an environment that is highly flexible, where lessons are adapted to the student’s pace and readiness. Creativity is actively nurtured, particularly through improvisational practices, which are central to mridangam performance. However, such systems tend to be limited in accessibility, as they depend on proximity to a guru and sustained commitment over long periods.

In contrast, institutional learning relies on written, structured methods of transmission, supported by syllabi, notation, and formal teaching schedules. The teacher–student relationship in this context is more formal and time-bound, shaped by classroom settings and academic calendars. While this approach ensures consistency and broad accessibility, it often introduces standardization that may restrict flexibility. Creativity, though present, can sometimes be constrained by the requirements of the syllabus and examination systems. At the same time, institutional frameworks make mridangam education available to a wider and more diverse group of learners, thereby contributing to its dissemination and continuity. Taken together, these comparisons underscore the need for a balanced and adaptive approach to mridangam pedagogy. The future of the art form lies not in privileging one model over another, but in thoughtfully integrating the embodied richness and intuitive depth of oral traditions with the inclusivity, organization, and reach of institutional systems. Such a synthesis has the potential to sustain both the integrity and the evolution of mridangam in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

V. Impact of Technology and Digital Platforms

The advent of the digital era has introduced a new dimension to mridangam pedagogy, fundamentally reshaping how knowledge is transmitted and accessed. Online classes have emerged as a powerful tool, enabling students to learn from accomplished artists regardless of geographical constraints. This has significantly expanded opportunities for learners who may not have had direct access to traditional gurus or reputed institutions. In addition, recorded lessons, whether in the form of video tutorials, lecture demonstrations, or archived performances, allow students to revisit complex rhythmic patterns multiple times, reinforcing understanding through repetition at their own pace. Such resources contribute to a more flexible and self-directed mode of learning, where the student can engage with material beyond the limitations of scheduled class time. Moreover, digital platforms have facilitated the global dissemination of mridangam, connecting practitioners, teachers, and audiences across continents and fostering a transnational community of learners.

Despite these advantages, the digital mode of instruction presents certain inherent challenges that affect the depth and quality of learning. One of the most significant limitations is the absence of tactile correction, which is crucial in percussion training. Subtle aspects such as hand positioning, pressure control, and tonal variation are often best conveyed through direct physical guidance, which virtual platforms cannot fully replicate. Additionally, the immediacy of feedback is reduced in online settings,

as delays in communication or limited observation can hinder the nuanced exchange between teacher and student. There is also the risk of superficial learning, where students may focus on reproducing patterns without fully internalizing their rhythmic logic or aesthetic significance. Without sustained mentorship and disciplined practice, the accessibility offered by digital tools can sometimes lead to fragmented or incomplete understanding. These technological transformations have broader cultural and pedagogical implications, bringing both gains and losses. On the positive side, the digital and institutional expansion of mridangam education has led to the democratization of learning. Individuals from diverse socio-economic and geographical backgrounds can now access training that was once restricted to specific lineages or locations. Furthermore, the increased emphasis on documentation, through notation, recordings, and academic research, contributes to the preservation of knowledge, ensuring that valuable compositions and techniques are not lost over time. The availability of certifications and formal qualifications also opens up professional avenues, enabling practitioners to pursue careers in teaching, performance, and scholarship within recognized frameworks. At the same time, these developments raise concerns about the potential dilution of experiential depth that characterizes traditional pedagogy. The immersive environment of the *guru–shishya Parampara*, with its emphasis on prolonged engagement and close personal interaction, is difficult to replicate in institutional or digital settings. As a result, the emotional and philosophical dimensions of learning may be weakened, leading to a more transactional approach to knowledge acquisition. The increasing reliance on standardized curricula and assessment methods can also contribute to the homogenization of artistic expression, where individuality and improvisational spontaneity are constrained by predefined structures. These tensions highlight a broader negotiation between tradition and modernity, where the need for accessibility and scalability must be balanced against the preservation of depth and authenticity. In this context, the future of mridangam pedagogy lies in the development of a hybrid model that thoughtfully integrates the strengths of both traditional and contemporary systems. Such an approach would combine the organizational clarity and reach of institutional frameworks with the depth and personalization of guru-based mentorship. For instance, structured curricula can be complemented by sustained one-on-one guidance, allowing students to benefit from both systematic progression and individualized attention. Similarly, the use of notation can be balanced with oral recitation practices such as *konnakol*, ensuring that rhythmic understanding remains both analytical and embodied. Furthermore, digital tools can be effectively integrated with in-person training to create a more comprehensive learning environment. Online resources and recorded materials can support practice and revision, while face-to-face sessions provide opportunities for correction, refinement, and deeper engagement. Assessment systems, instead of focusing solely on technical accuracy, can incorporate elements of improvisation and creative expression, thereby encouraging students to develop their own artistic voice. By fostering such a balanced and adaptive framework, it becomes possible to ensure that mridangam education remains both accessible and profound, responsive to contemporary realities while rooted in its rich pedagogical heritage.

VI. Conclusions

The entry of Mridangam into university systems in India represents a critical moment in the transformation of traditional knowledge systems into formalized academic disciplines. Institutions such as Tamil Nadu Dr. J Jayalalithaa Music and Fine Arts University, Annamalai University, and University of Madras have played a pivotal role in structuring Mridangam pedagogy through degree programs, diplomas, and research opportunities. Similarly, Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University and Banaras Hindu University offer postgraduate and doctoral programs that legitimize Mridangam as an academic subject. Mridangam pedagogy traditionally functioned within a primarily oral–aural framework, relying on memory, repetition, and sonic internalization. However, universities necessitate the transformation of such knowledge into written and visual formats, including notation systems and theoretical modules. Institutions like University of Delhi and Karnataka State Dr. Gangubai Hangal Music and Performing Arts University exemplify this shift, where Mridangam is taught through structured syllabi, credit-based systems, and evaluative frameworks. The move from orality to literacy restructures cognition itself, privileging analytical and segmented modes of understanding over holistic and experiential learning. At the same time, certain institutions attempt to retain elements of traditional pedagogy within academic frameworks. For instance, Kalakshetra Foundation and Kerala Kalamandalam embody what may be described as hybrid pedagogical spaces, where institutional structures coexist with the ethos of the *guru–shishya Parampara*. In such contexts, Mridangam learning is not reduced to textual knowledge but remains deeply connected to performative and ritualistic dimensions. The globalization of Mridangam pedagogy has further extended its presence into international academia, particularly within ethnomusicology and world music departments. Universities in North America and Europe often include Mridangam as part of South Asian ensemble training, situating it within broader discourses of intercultural performance. This phenomenon can be understood through Ethnomusicology, which examines music as a cultural practice embedded in social contexts. While such programs may lack the immersive rigor of traditional Indian training, they contribute to what scholars identify as the *detritorialization* of art forms, enabling Mridangam to function as a global pedagogical and performative medium. The academic inclusion of Mridangam has had profound implications for both pedagogy and artistic practice. On one hand, it democratizes access, breaking barriers of caste, lineage, and geography that historically limited participation. On the other hand, it introduces standardization, which may constrain improvisation and individual stylistic evolution—key elements of Carnatic percussion. This tension reflects a broader dialectic between tradition and modernity, where institutional frameworks prioritize measurable outcomes, while traditional systems value process-oriented, lifelong learning. Furthermore, the academic framing of Mridangam has enabled new avenues of research, documentation, and critical inquiry. Scholars and practitioners can now engage with the instrument not only as performers but also as researchers, contributing to its historiography, pedagogy, and theoretical understanding. However, as Bourdieu’s framework suggests, the conversion of artistic practice into academic capital also risks privileging certification over mastery. Therefore, the challenge lies in maintaining a balance between accessibility and depth, ensuring that the institutionalization of

Mridangam does not lead to the erosion of its rich oral and embodied traditions. Thus, the evolution from oral to institutional learning in Mridangam education is not merely a pedagogical shift but a cultural transformation. While institutionalization has made learning more accessible and structured, it cannot fully replace the depth and intimacy of oral traditions. The future of Mridangam pedagogy depends on a balanced integration that preserves tradition while embracing modernity.

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