

The Art and Science of Traditional Tabla Recital on Indian Tālas

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ABSTRACT: RHYTHM is a proportion of time inherent in all aspects of nature. In music, rhythm is not only that which beautifies the melody, it is also the vital force in melodic imagination. Thus it has been said that rhythm is the 'position of melody, nay of the universe'. Rabindranath Tagore, in his *The Religion of an Artist* (Visva-Bharati Bookshop, Calcutta. 1953, p. 18) says: What is rhythm? It is the movement generated and regulated by harmonious restrictions this is the creative force in the hand of the artist. So long as words remain in uncadenced prose form, they do not give any lasting feeling of reality. The moment they are taken and put into rhythm they vibrate into a radiance".

KEYWORDS: Indian Tālas, Tablā and its numerous syllables, role of accompaniment and solo,

I. INTRODUCTION

Time charged with energy sweeps across endless space, translating all things, from the smallest to the biggest, into rhythmic vibrations, it is not known what the earliest form of expressing rhythm was. Possibly primitive man discovered rhythm from the movement of his own body, and melody from the varying pitch of his voice. In course of time, his familiarity with rhythm and melody, inherent in all living beings, sharpened his musical sense.

Thus after a checkered career of musical development through centuries, man transformed his sense of rhythm into a Tāla and his sense of melody into a Rāga both of which are the organized and sophisticated forms of rhythm and melody respectively. Hence, although the: Rhythmic and melodic expressions are the purpose of Tāla and Rāga, a Tāla is much more than what is called rhythm and similarly a Rāga is much more than a mere Melody.

1.1. The art of Indian Tālas

Time, when measured and marked with a certain number of beats is called a "time-measure". But in India, a Tāla is just a conditioned time measure. Like; Rāgas, there are numerous Tālas, under independent names, features and a motive. A Tāla has a disciplined framework and it offers endless possibilities of expressing varied rhythmic ideas through compositions, which may be pre-conceived or spontaneous or a combination of both.

1.2. The scientific analysis of Indian Tāla system

A Tāla has several important factors of which a few are explained below:

- A definite number of beats of 'Mātrās'.
- Grouping of these beats into Sections called 'anga' (bar divisions).
- The first mātrā, called the "SAM" is the most important mātrā having maximum accent in the tāla-cycle known as the focal point of the tāla-cycle. The compositions which may start off from any point of the cycle, though usually from the Sam, BUT all of them irrespective of their starting points, do end up on the SAM, either delicately and gracefully or with an exciting climax,
- Similarly, there is a counter-balance in a tāla-cycle, called the KHĀLI, the least accentuated beat, For practical purpose, it only helps to locate the position of the other Aṅgas, and Mātrās.
- Avrtti (Cyclic rotation).
- Finally, the most important factor in a tāla-cycle is the 'THEKĀ' consisting of certain standard and fixed syllables (bols) which matching represent the tāla-cycle. Such syllabic sounds go to make up the language of the Tablā. Now, though the pair of the drums is considered as one unit or one instrument, independently the bass drum is called the Bāyān or Duggi while the treble drum is called Dāhinā or Tablā. But the tabla having more varieties of sound and timbre than its partner, both jointly is called Tabla.

1.3 Research Objectives and Significance of Bol-Bāni

The ingredients of the small phrases and big compositions are evolved from the following seven basic syllabic sounds, and their fifteen variations. Among the Ten basic sounds two are from the Bayan, left-hand drum: (1) Ghe, Ghen, Ghi, Ge, Ga - khuli or open sound, (2) ka, Ki, Ke, or kat - closed sound. Six are from the Tabla right-hand drum: (1) Nā or Tā - on the kinār side; (2) Ti or Tin - on the. Sur (lav); (3) Di or Din - open sound on Gav; (4) Tun - on the side playing of Sur (5) Te - close sound produced on Gav and (6) Re or Te - close sound produced on Gav by one finger and Two of both hand (1) Dhā, (2) Dhin - open sound. The additional fifteen derivative syllabic sounds of bols are produced by modulations of these ten sounds. Thus altogether twenty-two Sounds are produced for musical purpose like the twenty-two Srutis. Of these twenty-two sounds eight are produced by the left hand on the Bayan and fourteen by the right hand; and by means of combinations many other interesting sounds are produced. There are numerous syllables called 'BOLS. Bols which can also be pronounced orally phonetically like Nā, Tu, Tit, Tak, Ghe, Kat and combinations like Dhā, Dhet, Dhinā, Terckeṭetak, Dhinegéné, Ghentaraan etc. Syllables having no literal meaning as such, are the raw material of all types of rhythmic compositions, and they have a life of their own. They have colour timbre and aesthetic value, and a quality that comes from association in their use by the great masters of abstract musical language. You take a few syllables. You put them together, and in a way not explicable, they flash into life, and you have not just a syllabic sentence but song, a revelation, a new creation, a joy forever.

1.4 Research Objectives and Significance

Aims and objectives of the present study: The main aim and objectives of our study is to find out the course of evolution and change the forms of Indian Tālas so that the present and future scholars of Indian music can follow and realize the evolution of Indian Talas since ancient time. The time limit of our study is too long as the Tāla system of India is a continuous process. Therefore, we are bound expand our time since pre-Christian period.

- It is known to all that Indian Tālas were evolved from rhythm. But no scholar of any age was able to prove that how the ancient Indian Talas (Mārga or Desi) were developed from Chanda (rhythm). What are the basic differences and relations between Tāla and Chanda (rhythm) ?
- What are the reasons for the importance and popularity of rhythm in Hindusthani Sangit ?
- What is the reason for the popularity of Indian Tāla system?
- How did the Tablā of medieval and modern period evolve?
- What is the role of Tabla in becoming popular in the main stream Drumming Instrument?
- How the tabla skyrocketed in popularity as a companion instrument?

II. METHODOLOGY

The methods to be followed for the proposed study are:

- Consulting the important musicological Sanskrit texts of ancient India where Tālas are discussed in a separately.
- All the important treatises of modern music researchers and scholars to be studied.
- The musicological texts (Sanskrit) of the medieval period, where North Indian and South Indian Tālas are discussed, are to be studied.

2. Historical and Mythological Context

These syllables have no literal meaning they are ABSTRACT yet, with the help of these syllables. Great composers have given expression to their rhythmic imaginations, feelings, ideas and thoughts. They created beautiful compositions of varied designs to finally project in a Table Solo recital an animated and magnificent rhythmic mural. Just as in the field of vocal and instrumental music and also as in Western Classical Music, a galaxy of great composers of Table art lived during the last 150 to 200 years. Though there are different opinions as to the origin of the Table Art, the earliest name available. From authentic sources is that of Ustād Siddhār Khān who lived sometime in the 13th century in Delhi. The earliest of the other available names of great Tabla players, if you go back in an unbroken chronological form, today, would date back to early 18th century. As far as the usage of Tabla is concerned, we can definitely say that Tabla, as a concert instrument gradually came into prominence in the mid 18th century to provide suitable accompaniment the then newly introduced Khayāl singing introduced by the great composer Sadārāñ/Niānat Khan, under the patronage of Muhammed Shah II and Gulām Rasool of Lucknow. However, Dhrupad used to be the main and popular form of classical vocal music, for which accompaniment was provided by the Pakhāwaj, a horizontal percussion instrument, with a mighty sound.

2.1. Role of Accompaniment in Tablā recital

Tabla has two roles-accompaniment and solo. Firstly, it is used in accompaniment to vocal and instrumental music and Kathak dance, and secondly, it is used for solo performances: Accompaniment, again, is of two kinds (i) Just keeping time (literally); and (ii) skillful Sangat, the art of accompaniment, in the real sense of the term. In classical music, whether is for opera or concert, there are two methods of accompaniment on the drums: (i) well-rehearsed; and (ii) unrehearsed. In the case of opera and the cinema the music is well rehearsed. In a concert hall, however, it may be otherwise. The accompanist sometimes plays with a musician he meets for the first time on the stage.

This is truly a crucial trial for the accompanist, for he does not know on which tāla the song or gat composition for instruments is based; nor does he know the tempo and the sem. If he fails to identify the tāla and pinpoint the place of the sam the performance is a failure, and such a failure tells upon the prestige of the accompanist, irrespective of the seniority or otherwise of the main artiste.

2.2. Characteristics of Tablā solo recital

A Tabla solo recital is supposed to be performed with a melodic accompaniment provided on Sarangi. The Sarangi accompanist steadily repeats the suitable melody called Nagmā, till the finale of soloist. A solo performance opens with a short and brilliant composition called MUKHDĀ or MOHRĀ which literally means a face or glittering entry piece. This may be followed by a set of other mukhdās just to establish the proper atmosphere/warming up. Then comes the first introductory section called the PESHKĀR, which is coined from 'Pesh-Karnā' (to introduce). The peshkār consists of a few syllables arranged to form a theme or a base of the Tala. The principal syllables are borrowed from the bols of the Thekā (the standard set of syllables representing the fala-cycle). However, with the theme as a base, the artiste improvises as per his feelings and vision, yet, systematically, sequentially with the same syllables of the theme for quite some time and then sounds off with a Tihāl comprising the same syllables. Much of the peshkār is improvised spontaneously.

Then the artiste moves to another type of composition called QĀIDĀ. The principle of improvisation though similar to that of the peshkār is much more elaborate because its theme goes on forming various definite shapes termed as Bal, Pech, Girāh, Fandā. A Qaida need not necessarily borrow syllables from the Thekā. It is an independent traditional short Composition, a couplet enshrined with potential for elaborate improvisations. Qaidas are of various designs. The improvisation of a Qaida is often pre-conceived.

Next comes the RELĀ (the principle of lit. flow/flood). Improvisation is almost same as the Qaida, but in a Relā fine and delicate bols are strung and are intricately woven. A Relā is always played at a high speed, not with a purpose of showing off one's virtuosity or dexterity of fingers but to create a drone effect; something similar to the sound of a bumble-bee or the rapid flapping of the wings of a humming-bird. In all the three, Peshkār, Qāidā and Relā, the principle theme is first played at half its natural speed and then geared up to double-speed followed by progressive improvisation. Please note that improvisation does not mean playing anything that comes to the mind, which is done in Free Jazz. Here the improvisation goes along a definite sequence. The most interesting fact of Tabla art, as in other forms of Art music, is that in spite of having several rules and laws, the artiste still enjoys great freedom in expressing himself. Something like a swan floating away in a lake which nevertheless has its boundaries.

After the Relā, the artiste moves on to a series of shorter set compositions. The first category of such compositions is called GATH. They are already composed and normally consist of bold syllables and are played in single and double speeds. They normally don't have a Tihāi. There are various types of gats like;- Akāl-gat (e. g.) Jod-Hātti gath (e. g.) Chowdbārā Gath, Tridhārā Gath, Dodhārā Gath (e. g.) There are 48 varieties. After playing a couple of Gats, the artiste accelerates the speed of the Thekā and enters into the final section of series of Tukdās which are normally recited and performed. A TUKDĀ is a short, fast and brilliant composition giving dazzling effects and ending up with a tihāi. Several Tukdās of various designs/kaleidoscopic designs and thoughts are rattled off like machinegun fire. In this final section, the artiste also plays CHAKRADĀRS, which are longer versions of Tukdā, but they have to be played thrice finally to arrive at the Sam. There is no literature, no melody, yet the Tabla Art is a COMPLETE an ABSOLUTE Art.

III. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Then after detecting the appropriate tala its sam and the tempo either on his own or by a hint from the main artiste, he has to establish very firmly in the minds of all, the rhythmic structure of the melodic composition- Thus he gradually creates confidence in his own mind and then, with a feeling of relief, transmits that confidence to the minds of the main artiste and the audience. Thereafter the performance proceeds smoothly, with appropriate rhythmic embellishments. In

the case of classical vocal music, Khayāl, for example, the present trend is to include the ālāp known as vistār within the frame of the vilambit, (slow) song. Alāp is not executed before the actual song, as it is done in Dhrupad. Hence the tabla accompanist is supposed to play, during the vistar only the thekā of the necessary tāla, clearly and melodiously but in a subdued manner and with a strong sense of accommodation. This continues until the main artiste steers the movements further. Then, with the slightly the accompanist feels faster tempo, the accompanist feels stimulated to play out one or two small rhythmic compositions with a view to the musical need. Keeping pace with the vocalist then takes up a drut song the same Raga but in a faster tempo, and the accompanist gets a better chance to display his talent and sometimes to allow the vocalist to pause for breath or a short tryst, thus enriching his total effect.

IV. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Everyone present becomes more attentive when a savāl-javāb, question- and-answer, takes place. The main artiste, usually an instrumentalist, produces a melodic tihāi, or a (ukdā, or chakradār, and expects the tabla player to reproduce the rhythm exactly on his tabla with identical syncopation paraphrasing, scansion and intonation. The tabla player, summoning all his sincerity, ready wit, and other necessary qualities, responds to the challenge, and usually succeeds in full measure; only rarely does a tabla player fail. If, however, the main artiste detects even 'a single small flaw, he will relish the discomfort of the accompanist. Savā!- Javāb is normally found to be one-sided, because it is not customary for the tabla player to expect the main artiste to reproduce a tukdā or an intricate chakradār played on the tablā. However, from the layman's point of view, it is very interesting and exciting. But on the part of the tabla player it is a test of skill and musical intelligence.

V. ROLE IN PRESERVING CULTURAL IDENTITY

The most thrilling section of the whole performance takes place when the tabla Player is inspired to extemporize in the form of Sāth Sangat. Instead of playing the thekā of the tāla being performed, he plays extempore to synchronize with the rhythmic outlines of the various metres being employed by the vocalist or the instrumentalist. But here, especially in North Indian music, both the artistes keep the outline of the tala cycle in mind and try to outwit each other by way of dodging. Hide and seek, surprise cross-rhythm and so on, all without the assistance of any external signals. In south Indian music and dance a third person keeps time either on a pair of cymbals, or by clapping. At times both artistes go far away from the orbit of the tala cycle and then try to puzzle or confuse each other while keeping the correct tempo and the tala cycle in mind, and then both return together exactly on the Sam. and re- establish the original pace of the music. A truly exciting non-meat!

VI. RESULTS

As a solo performing art, the Tabla developed to its highest and most refined stage during the last 100 or at the most 150 years, during which time, thousands of beautiful and brilliant compositions were created by the great Tabla composers and players. There is a small BUT which is very significant. Most of the great composers' and players didn't know to read and write. Yet, they learnt, composed and remembered thousands of compositions. Dimension of repertoire of the subject developed through group-discussions, competition and challenge posed between the musicians and of course through a lot of intense thinking and research. Quite a lot of these compositions have come down to us today, mainly the rough oral-transmission, coupled with talim (coaching). Many compositions of course have been lost, because they But the compositions were never written. Sections that have survived till today are so many that it will take generations to learn, digest and assimilate them.

Among the traditions established in North India the following are the major schools; Delhi, Ajrālā, Lucknow, Each school Farukhābad and Punjab. Each school or Gharanā having its distinctive style and concept has been named after the above mentioned places where the great thinkers/composers lived.

VII. CONCLUSION

One of the major characteristics of Indian Music is "Paramparā or Tradition". It may be a tradition of Vocal Music or Instrumental Music or Percussion Music. However, the tradition consists of the few characteristics, which are rigid. But keeping the tradition in tact, one may utilize their power of imagination in Music – that is 'Creation'. Without creation an art cannot be formed. Unfortunately, the picture of our Indian Music that most of the ancient traditions are lost. In other branches of our Indian Music, of course there are some researchers work done, but in case of "Tāla" we don't get a proper research on Indian Tāla system, starting from very ancient period. I could manage most of these

ancient musical books from private sources. Whatever I have, collected the ancient Indian musicological texts, I believe, are sufficient to complete my work.

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