

## **Influence of Percussive Accompaniment on Folk Song for its Evolution into Semi Classical Music**

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### **Abstract**

*From the earliest days of human civilisation, folk music has always remained an intrinsic part of the daily life. With the gradual advent and advancement of the society, music too has found its own way of refinement. In the musical history of the Indian subcontinent, this journey of folk songs evolving into semi-classical or classical compositions has been long. And throughout this journey the vocal musical forms have always been aptly accompanied and complemented by different instruments having their particular styles. The role that the accompaniment can play in forming the character of a song is immense. This particular study focuses on this same aspect of the role that accompaniment plays on a particular song and how influential can it be in the transition of a folk song to another genre. This qualitative research study is done with the help of sources like books, journals, research articles, CDs, Internet browsing and interviews. Ultimately, to showcase the transition of folk into semi-classical through the influence of accompanying instruments, six samples of a particular seasonal folk song – a Hori - is chosen. The song is kept fixed to justify the importance of accompaniment even more and an analytical study is made within these six samples with a special focus on the rhythmic and percussive elements in them. Through the analysis, the transition from pure folk to semi-classical is showcased and the importance and influence of accompaniment is concluded.*

Keywords: Folk song, Semi-classical music, Hori, Accompaniment and Percussion

### **Introduction:**

Music has always been one of the most important aspects in the lives of Indian people. The Indian music broadly gets divided in to two tributaries – i) The folk Music of India and ii) The Indian Classical Music. The rich cultural diversity along with the vast geographical periphery of the Indian subcontinent has greatly contributed to various forms of folk music. Almost every region of India has its own folk music, which reflects and resonates the way of life. (Ranade, 2006) Similarly, Indian Classical Music is again one of the oldest art forms of India and is one of the richest heritages of this country. This particular genre of music is regarded as one of the most intricate, content rich yet soulful among all the musical genres throughout the world. From the earliest days, vocal rendition of the music has occupied a principal role in the tradition of Hindustani Music. (Rao Sahib Prabhakar, 1912) And along with the evolution of the Indian society, the music has seen a lot of changes in its structure, content and approach. With the advent of time, Hindustani vocal music has evolved into

different branches like *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar*, *Khayal* and sub-branches of classical and semi-classical like and *Thumri*, *Kajri*, *Hori*, *Chaiti*, *Tappa* etc. (Pudaruth, 2016) With both these genres of music, accompaniment has always complemented the vocal presentation in every aspects and has remained one of the decisive factors in the way it is catered to as well as accepted by the audience.

### **Illustration:**

The Indian Folk music is closely associated with the rustic professions like farming, sailing, fishing etc., seasons and social occasions like marriage, religious rituals etc. They evolved to alleviate the hardship and break the monotony of the routine life of a person. While the *Dhrupadias* and *Kheyalias*, who give primacy to *Taalim* and not to temperament, the folk singers reverse the order and cultivates suitable temperament for rendering it. In the Lec-Dem at IIT Madras assisted by Dr. Shyamrao Kulkarni, he states that the social urge behind the co-existence of the Classical and the folk is unmistakable. This change seems to follow the law of human evolution—ways of thinking, education, social set - In singing folk songs one has to dispense with things, such as a classical rendering of *Asthai* and *Antara*. *Gamak*, *Soot*, intricate *Taans*, correct and detailed analysis and composition of the Ragas, and a technique or style too severe for its text and meaning. (Kulkarni, 2012)

In the history of the Awadh region (comprising present Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) there is a tradition of performing folk songs related to seasonal celebrations like *Chaiti*, *Kajari*, *Sawani* etc. The songs are composed in local Maithili, Braj, Mirjapuri or Bhojpuri languages. Similarly, *Hori* is a grand celebration of the festival of colours. The present day *Hori* is an evolution of this age old tradition of folk singing during this festival of colours and can be partly associated with a faster version of *Thumri*. Traditionally for practicing and performing these forms of vocal music, apart from the *Tanpura*, there is an immense importance of some other accompanying instruments and accompanists. Any vocal performance is incomplete without the proper '*Saath Sangaat*' of its accompanists. (Mukherjee, 2006)

Among the accompanying instruments in these songs, generally, the rhythm or *Taala* support is given by *Tabla* or *Pakhawaj* while the *Sarengi*, *Harmonium* or *Violin* gives the melodic support by following and imitating the vocalist. Simultaneously, it can also be mentioned that while the melody instruments like *Sarengi* /*Harmonium* / *Violin* creates the background for the vocalist, it is the *taala* section comprising of *Tabla* or *Pakhawaj* which acts as a complementary to the vocal music and is virtually inseparable from a vocal performance. (Pradhan, *Hindustani Music: Ways of listening*, 2016) In North India, the *Tabla* is one of the principal accompanying percussions along with *Pakhawaj* and *Dholak*. Accompanying vocal music is always challenging for both the rhythmic and melodic accompanists as through the whole performance he has to follow the vocalist's imaginations and sentiments. In this context it can be mentioned how the legendary *tabla* maestro Pt. Shankar Ghosh describes about the art of accompaniment in his book *Anaddha* with special reference to *tabla* accompaniment: While accompanying, a *tabla* player requires much more intelligence and dexterity in his performance than that of *tabla* solo playing. Accompanying vocal music is one of the most challenging roles for a *tabla* player and it needs much more maturity and knowledge of vocal music to do so. *Thumri* and other semi-classical accompaniment is an essential part for a *tabla*

player. For a good vocal accompaniment *bayan* is the most essential part as it is through *bayan* and difference pressures of wrist that the modulations in thekas occur. (Ghosh S., Anaddha, 1994)

It has already been mentioned that it was the need in the manner of self-expression of poetic sentiments, and the monotony of keeping oneself into the rigidity and limitations of the rules of *Khayal*, which gave birth to *Thumri* along with further exploration of other semi-classical tributaries like *Tappa*, *Hori*, *Kajri*, *Chaiti* etc. *Alaap*, *Dhrupad*, *Khayal* to *Thumri*, *Dadra*, *Hori*, *Tappa*—it is a procession from the abstract and the divine to the concrete and the human, with an increasing prominence of the verbal. (Manuel, 1990). Along with the genre of the songs the style and instruments of accompaniment change completely.

While accompanying a semi-classical or a folk number, when the tabla player is given his part to play, he must try to follow the similar sentiment of the song and create his imaginations. That is why the *laggi* sections in a semi-classical number are always weaved into patterns along with the tabla player's imaginations turning it into another form of abstract music. Author Ramakrishna Das aptly states in his article Secrets of *Taal* and Tabla accompaniment: "Tabla accompaniment needs a sharp mind and the ability of understanding the main artiste's taste and requirement". To do this, the accompanist should have a thorough knowledge of the art. Acharya Shankar Ghosh mentions how essential it is to embellish the theka. The first essential rhythmic idea that a percussion player needs to be comfortable with is playing a *theka* at a steady tempo. The next step involves the embellishment of the basic *theka*, which in fact points to the individuality of the performer. The embellishment may be in the nature of subtle pressures of the wrist between the *bayan* strokes and sometimes coinciding with the strokes, or more explicit when the performer uses *bols* on one or both drums that do not necessarily belong to the universally accepted skeletal framework of the *theka*. The embellishment reduces when the original pace of the *theka* is quickened (Ghosh S., Anaddha Part II, 2008). While mentioning about Tabla accompaniment in light classical and use of *Laggi Ladis*, Pt. Nayan Ghosh in the seminar from ITC SRA describes how *laggi-ladis* are played while accompanying semi-classical and light classical forms such as *Thumri*, *Tappa*, *Hori*, *Kajri*, *Bhajan*, *Ghazal*, *Dadra*, etc. *Laggi-ladis* are usually short, soft and melodious compositions, which can be expanded. These are usually composed of the *bols* of the theka of the *taal* in which they are played. Since *laggis* and *ladis* are played while accompanying semi-classical forms, they are ostensibly composed in *taals* having a youthful gait like *Dadra*, *Keharwa*, *Deepchandi*, etc. These compositions are never played with *taals* that evoke a somber mood. Since *laggis* are useful in accompanying light music, all Tabla players should be acquainted with the technique of playing them. These compositions are often employed after the vocalist completes the *antara*. (Ghosh N., 2009)

To understand the importance of the accompaniment - both style and instrument - a further analysis is done. Six samples of an extremely popular *Hori*: *Aaj Biraj Mein Holi Re Rasiya*, is taken from one of the most popular social media - YouTube. In these six samples the same song is sung by different artistes with different accompanying instruments and different musical arrangements. The song is kept same in all six samples to showcase how the accompaniment can influence and make the song evolve from a purely folk song to a semi-classical number:

1) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0jc\\_Fx2Ki0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0jc_Fx2Ki0)

This is an audio sample which consists of only the song without any accompaniment. It is performed by Smt. Anisha Sharma. This sample is taken to showcase how the song sounds on its own without any influence of any other instruments on it.

2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziIeP6OGj8s>

Here the song is performed by Acharya Mridul Krishan Shastri ji. This is a music video album: Nek Aage aa Shyam Tope Rang Darun. The song is accompanied by a host of different instruments like Sarengi, Dholak, Keyboard, Banjo etc. The way the accompaniment is done along with the selection of the *laya* of the song makes a major impression on the song and its characteristics. Here the song is performed as totally folk number where it is to be performed during the festival of Hori to a rustic audience.

3) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd27rzGPzCY>

This sample is taken from the album Pushtimargiya Dolotsav Kirtans. This sample is again an example how the accompanying instruments can change the character of a song. The song starts with a small dholak introduction and then is joined by sarengi and flute. The style of the accompaniment makes it clear that the song has slightly evolved from pure folk towards semi classical.

4) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx4DxKTLzHU>

This is an audio clip from the performance by the legendary vocalist Vidushi Sobha Gurtu from the album Songs of the Seasons: Volume 2 from Times Music. The song is accompanied by Shri Aneesh Pradhan on the tabla and Shri Purushottam Walawalkar on the Harmonium. This particular song is a perfect example how much the accompanying instruments can influence a particular performance and can be placed in the middle to showcase the transition of a folk song into semi-classical because of the accompanying instruments. When the song and the accompaniment is analyzed, its seen that the *gayaki* or the stylization of the vocalist along with tabla accompaniment has enough semi-classical elements in them. But surprisingly the use of a single metal percussion – commonly known as *chimta* or *chimpta* in India – gives a totally new dimension and flavour to the song. The use of that particular instrument makes the song much lighter and adds a lot of folk element in it. It shows us how, in spite of the *gayaki* and the principal accompanying instruments having classical and semi-classical elements, a single instrument can change the flavour of a song.

5) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMWMHx490LI>

This is a live video clip of a performance from the renowned vocalist Dhanashree Pandit Rai. She is accompanied on Tabla by Shri Kalinath Mishra, Shri Anwar Hussain on Sarengi and Shri Guruprasad Hegde on the Harmonium. Here it can be noticed how this popular folk

song is gradually changing into a semi-classical song with the influence of its accompanying instruments. She begins the performance tagging the song as a Hori/Thumri which again helps us very much in locating the transition of the folk song into the light classical genre. The stylization of the performance or the *gayaki* of the song is perfectly complemented by the tabla accompaniment. If we analyze the style of the tabla accompaniment we can understand how it has influenced the song to have its light classical flavor. It is for sure if a dholak or other folk instrument would have accompanied, the rendition would not have so much semi-classical flavor. The vocal performance is perfectly complemented by the accompanying instruments here to give it that semi-classical texture.

**6) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSenDchmjQ0>**

The final example is of an audio clip performed by renowned vocalist Shrimati Kumkum Sanyal. The song is accompanied by tabla and harmonium. This performance is a perfect rendition which shows us how the song sounds when performed as a semi-classical/light classical number. The *gayaki* and the styles of the tabla and harmonium accompaniment complement each other. The *theka* of the tabla as well as the interludes played by the harmonium – all add to that semi- classical element of the song.

**Conclusion:**

The embodiment of a particular song lies in the stylisation of its accompaniment. The accompaniment of a song actually complements it to the final production that gets catered to the audience (Pradhan, *Tabla: A Performer's Perspective*, 2011). Analysing the above six links justifies this even more. It becomes clear and vivid how the presence or absence of an accompanying instrument single handedly influences the texture and presentation of the song. Apart from the fact of the presence of the accompanying instrument, it can also be seen how much importance is carried by the way the accompaniment is performed. Accompaniment always serves as a complementary factor to the development of a song. The quality and playing style of the accompaniment acts a decisive factor in the characterization of the song. Thus, the importance of the influential elements in accompaniment can be established in determining as well as transforming a particular folk song into the semi-classical genre.

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- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hori\\_%28music%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hori_%28music%29)
- <https://indianraga.wordpress.com/tag/kajri/>

### Video Links:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0jc\\_Fx2Ki0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0jc_Fx2Ki0)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziIeP6OGj8s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd27rzGPzCY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx4DxKTLzHU>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMWMHx490LI>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSenDchmjQ0>
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