

The Beauty of Fixed Compositions of Tabla

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Abstract

“Geetam vadyam tatha nrityam trayam sangeetamuchyate” Music (Sangeet) is a combination of song, instrument and dance. Rhythm (Laya) is an inherent feature of all three music forms. Rhythm accompanies all forms of music. This very rhythm has been explored to a large extent today which has evolved into that having a central place on stage. Laya can express itself in multifarious forms through the instrument and its art of accompanying. The creative thinking and enormous hard work for practice (riyaaz) by the Maestros of Tabla of the past and present have made Tabla the chief percussion instrument in India with its worldwide acclamation. The elaborate and non-elaborate compositions of Tabla constitute a Solo performance. Elaborate compositions are lyrical and poetic in nature. They carry a wide scope of improvisation. Non-elaborative compositions, which are generally referred to as ‘Fixed Compositions’ are unique in several ways. Music with aesthetics is much more appreciated than Music with only its science. While all compositions of Tabla carry aesthetical elements, present paper deals with Fixed compositions. The variety of Fixed compositions available in Tabla's repertoire ignites different facets of imagination in the artist to make the composition musically impressive. They have been composed not only with skill, science and tradition but also have been derived from the innate capacity of the artists to imagine the sounds of nature or anything that could make them feel in a way so to connect the language of Tabla to their creative pursuits. Author has spoken here about different fixed compositions of Tabla technically and also tried to dwell on its aesthetics. These compositions form the basis for the versatility of Tabla Solo presentation.

Key Words: Tabla, Gat, Tukda, Laya, Chakradhaar, Aesthetics

1. Introduction

Broadly, there are two categories of compositions of Tabla: Elaborate and Fixed compositions. Elaborate compositions like the Kaida offer scope for making variations from the theme of the composition. Poetic rhyming is a striking feature of these compositions. They end with a Tihai. Elaborate compositions are played during the beginning and continue till at least half the duration of Tabla solo playing. Among them, Peshkaar sets the stage in a slow tempo with improvisations and layakari (variations in rhythm). This composition also tunes the audience gradually into the artist's subsequent Tabla playing. This is followed by the presentation of Kaidas and Relas which are elaborated into many variations from the theme of the

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compositions. These compositions show the preparedness (tayyari) of the Tabla player and showcase the salient features of his school of playing (Gharana).

Every composition is unique in its own way. Fixed compositions of Tabla are distinct in their structure and musicality. There are varieties of fixed compositions in Tabla. Each composition has been made with a profound thought process involved in it in order to express in a way so that the sound and melody carry the essence of the literal meaning of the names of the composition like Tukda, Gat, Paran and so on. Nevertheless, fixed compositions offer very special music. The phrases and their pairing are different from other fixed compositions. These compositions are inspired by the different sounds of nature. The emphasis (Jarab) on certain syllables or phrases, modulation in the language as that happens in a conversation, and combination of a variety of phrases and layakari, all these features make fixed compositions distinctive.

2. Fixed Compositions of Tabla

2.1. Tukda:

The word 'Tukda' in hindi means 'piece'. Tukda is a combination of various phrases (compared to pieces in a literal sense). A Tukda when played in a fast tempo after the presentation of elaborate compositions, breaks the monotony of the performance and leads it to a different plane in a snap's time. This transition beautifully marks the onset of playing fixed compositions that follow. Short Tukdas played in succession keep the audience focused by drawing their complete attention towards the play. It may not be always necessary to start the repertoire of fixed compositions from Tukda. Some artists may start from Gats too. It is up to the artist as to how well he connects his compositions aesthetically in a sequence. Chakradaars of some Tukdas is also played, which lends to a good pairing and makes it all the more interesting.

Some Tukdas are so well composed with modulation in phrases, pauses and rhyming that the entire composition can be compared to any human activity or to animate and inanimate aspects of nature. This is in-depth creativity by which an artist is able to relate his composition even to a layman. This is something beyond science and seldom do we find such profound artists with this flair. Example of a composition in Teentaal that might trigger an oral conversation of day-to-day life:

TAKITADHA	STAKITA	DHINSSNA	KITATAKATETS
X			
SNAKIDANAGA	TIRAKITATAKTAAS	SGHESGHE	SGHESNTA
2			
DHASKIDANAGA	TIRAKITATAKTAAS	SGHESGHE	SGHESNTA
O			
DHASKIDANAGA	TIRAKITATAKTAAS	SGHESGHE	SGHESNTA
3			
DHA			
X			

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2.2. Gat:

The term 'Gat' is derived from the Hindi word 'Gati' which means Speed. This doesn't mean that Gat is identified only by its speed or tempo. The term 'speed' may be a reference for other aspects of the composition like 'ooj' (force or energy), 'dum' (pauses), 'jarab' (emphasis) and 'wajan' (weight in a musical sense). The compositions of Tabla which are simple and do not carry any specialty are called Shuddh Gats. Gats is usually played more than once. A Gat may not land on 'Sum' with a Tihai. There are several types of Gats that I will be talking about in the due course. Now, I want to dwell upon the salient features of Gat which are quite different from other fixed compositions.

The masters of Tabla have gone deep into their imagination and creative domains and tried to correlate several activities that take place in Nature with the help of syllables and sounds of Tabla. The expressions imbued in the compositions may be as diverse as that of a crying child, elephants trumpeting, chirping of birds, scolding, dancing, running, human traits like laziness, activity, sleep, wakefulness, anger, love and so on. Hence the surrounding environment and innate human nature have influenced the compositions of Gat. Gats do offer this kind of potential for expression, but the exhibition and portrayal of these features depends not only on the skill of the artist, but also his creative capacities. Otherwise, the playing is merely a presentation of skill and science and not aesthetical.

"Each instrument has a spirit that can guide you to say what they want to say. So that's what we are discovering with Tabla"- Ustad Zakir Hussain (2018)

In short, it may be said that a Gat is a fixed composition composed by maestros and composers with a capacity to fetch an experience of various elements in nature through the language of tabla. A gat usually finishes before the sum, and hence can be repeated. A Gat played more than once is impressive. A Gat may end with some other syllable and not Dha. Gats are played in single and double speeds. Gats represent the poetic abilities and musical understanding of the composer. The schools (gharana) of Khula Baaz (Lucknow & Punjab) have more Gats than the schools of Band Baaz (Delhi and Ajrada).

'Gat' is defined by several authors- "A composition which is made of flexible phrases, from which no elaboration or variation can be done and which is different from Kaida, Tukda, Paran and Peshkar referred to as Gat" (Srivastav, 1996). Gat is a special composition that is complete in itself. It is neither improvised nor has Khula or Band section. Great Tabla players have composed beautiful Gats which are passed on generation to generation. These Gats shows their skill and flight of imagination. (Verma, 2010).

Broadly, Gats are of two types:

a) Vistaarsheel (Expandable) Gats:

The Gats that can be elaborated. Examples are Gat-Kaida and Rela-Gat.

Rela-Gat in Teentaal:

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DhaSSdha ghidanagadingataga TakSSdha ghidanagadingataga

X

DhaStiraghidanaga dingatagadhaStira ghidanagadhaStira ghidanagadinataga

2

DhaStiraghidanaga dhirdhirghidanaga DhaStiraghidanaga dhirdhirghidanaga

O

DhaStiraghidanaga dingatagadhaStira ghidanagadhaStira ghidanagadinataga

3

TaaSStaa kidanagatingataga TakSStaa kidanagatingataga

X

TaaStirakidanaga TingatagaTaaStira kidanagataaStira kidanagatinataga

2

DhaStiraghidanaga dhirdhirghidanaga DhaStiraghidanaga dhirdhirghidanaga

O

DhaStiraghidanaga dingatagadhaStira ghidanagadhaStira ghidanagadinataga

3

DHA

X

The above Gat can be elaborated like the Rela. Hence it is called Rela Gat.

b) Avistaarsheel (Fixed) Gats:

They are fixed and cannot be elaborated. They are as follows:

- i) **Dupalli:** Gats which have two different layas of the same phrase.

Dupalli in Teentaal:

Dhinaghi DaSna Dhinaghi Danaga

X

Takati Rakita Dhatraka Dhikita

2

Kataga Digana DhaSS DhinaghidaSna

O

Dhinaghidanaga Takatirakita Dhatrakdhikita Katagadigana

3

DHA

X

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- ii) **Tripalli:** Gats which have three different layas of the same phrase.
- iii) **Choupalli:** Gats which have four different layas of the same phrase.

Choupalli in Teenaal:

DhaS nadhi kita dhatra
X
Kadhi kita ketra kadhi
2
Kita kata gadi gana
O
DhaS dhaSna dhikita dhatraka
3
Dhikita ketraka dhikita kataga
X
Digana dhaSdhaS nadhikita dhatrakadhi
2
Kitaketra kadhikita katagadi ganadhaS
O
DhaSnadhikita Dhatrakadhikita Ketrakadhikita Katagadigana
3
DHA
X

- iv) **Dudhari:** Every phrase is played two times and completes in one or two cycles of the Taal. It does not have a Tihai.
- v) **Tidhari:** Every phrase is played three times and completes in one or two cycles of the Taal. It does not have a Tihai.

Tidhari in Teentaal:

Dinadinadina Dhagenadhagena Dhagenatakita Takitatakita
X
Dhadagenadhada Genadhadagena Takadhinataka Dhinatakadhina
2
Takatakataka Tinatinatina Taakenataakena Taakenadhatraka
O
Dhinnagdhatraka Dhinnagadhatraka Dhinnagaghenaga ghenagaghenaga
3
DHA
X

- vi) **Choudhari:** Every phrase is played four times and completed.

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- vii) **Dumuhi Gat:** This composition has the same group of syllables/phrases at the beginning and at the end of the composition. Hence the name ‘Dumuhi’ meaning ‘two-faced’. This specialty makes the composition very interesting to hear and appreciate.

Dumuhi Gat in Teentaal:

Dhighidanaga Takghidanaga Dhighidanaga Tirakitataka
X
Dhinaginadhina Ginataktak Tirakitataka TaaSS
2
TaaSti Takkdan Tinakidanaka Tirakitataka
O
TaaS Sdha Sdhi Ghidanaga
3
DHA
X

- viii) **Farad Gat:** ‘Farad’ is a Persian word which means ‘Ekkad’ meaning ‘once’. This composition is played only once but has a great impact upon the listeners. The combination of phrases are sometimes very rarely seen and heard in other compositions. The ending of the composition is unpredictable, with small and forceful phrases like ‘DhirDhirkita’ and ‘kitatakadingada’.

Farad Gat in Teentaal (From Khali):

Dhirdhirkat Dhirdhirkat Dhitadhita Dhagetita
O
Kdedhetdhi kitadhaS Kitataka takitadha
3
Katitadha Dhintadhet Tagenna DhaSSS
X
Gadigana SSSga DiSgana Gadigana
2
Kitatak Dhettaa TaaSkitataka TaaSdhet
O
Tagenna Dhagetita Ghenanana kitatakadingada
3
DHA
X

- ix) **Anagat or Aasum:** Composition that ends before the Sum of the Taal. The listeners are taken away by awe and fascination. This becomes more interesting if the composition finishes as much as closer to the Sum. There is a clear emphasis on the last Dha of the Tihai and the very small ‘silence’ before the Sum is the beauty that makes the audience spellbound.

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- x) **Ateet:** Composition ending after the Sum or being played even after the arrival of Sum of the Taal again leaves the listeners in an amazing wonder. The listener finds it difficult to latch on to Sum while the artist emphasizes the Sum in the subsequent beat of the taal. The time gap between the last Dha and the catching the next beat of the Taal is perfect timing is of much aesthetical value.

2.3. Paran

The word Paran is derived from the word 'Parn', which means leaf. The phrases in Paran are arranged as the veination in leaf. Paran is made of heavy phrases. These compositions are derived from Pakhawaj. They are played in Kathak dance and also in Tabla solos. Parans are commonly played in Benaras Gharana. They are played with strong and open sounds in order to bring out the impression of Pakhawaj sounds. Parans can be played once as Simple Parans or thrice as Chakradaar Parans.

Simple Paran in Teentaal:

Dhagetita Tagetita Dhagetita Tagetita |
X
Kdadhatita Dhagetita Gadigana Nagetita |
2
Katitadha Genadhage Titakata Gadigana |
O
DhaSSS Gadigana DhaSSS Gadigana |
3
DHA
X

2.4. Chakradaar

The word 'Chakradaar' means repetition. Any Tukda, Gat or Paran which is repeated thrice (punaravritti) is known as a Chakradaar. It is repetition and not elaboration, hence Chakradaar is also a fixed composition. I would like to talk about two types of Chakradaar here, and they are named after the specialty or uniqueness of the composition.

a) Farmaishi Chakradaar

One version of the nomenclature is in the name itself. During concerts (baithak) of Tabla in the past, the artists and connoisseurs of music from the audience would ask the Tabla player to play a composition and hence a chakradaar was played. As the composition was demanded/requested to be played and the word 'Farmaish' in Urdu means Demand or request, this composition was popularly known as Farmaishi Chakradaar.

The second version of this term is technical and closer to the real meaning of the term. This says that when the First Dha of the first section of the Tihai in the first round (palla) of Chakradaar arrives on Sum, and the second Dha of the second section of the Tihai in the second round (palla) arrives on Sum and the third and the last Dha of the last section of the Tihai arrives on Sum, it is called Farmaishi Chakradaar. This explanation is the generally accepted one.

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b) Kamaali Chakradaar

The word 'Kamaal' in Urdu means 'Magic or Magical'. Hence a chakradaar which has a magical element to it is a Kamaali Chakradaar. The magical element in this chakardaar again lies in its Tihai. The Tihai in each part (palla) of the composition has 'nine Dhas'. There are three consecutives 'Dhas' in each phrase of the Tihai. Hence there are nine (3 x 3) 'Dhas' in each palla of the composition and totally twenty-seven 'Dhas' (9 x 3) in the whole composition. The reason that makes it Kamaali is that the first Dha (out of 3) of first section of the Tihai arrives on Sum in the first round and the second Dha (out of 3) of the second section of the Tihai arrives on Sum in the second round and the third and last Dha (out of 3) of third section of the Tihai arrives on Sum in the last round of the composition. This is a Calculation Magic well thought over by the masters of the yesteryears. Their genius remains unparalleled even today. Such compositions can be made in any Taal with Taal specific calculation.

3. Findings and Conclusion:

Fixed compositions are a part and parcel of Tabla Solo playing. The onset of these compositions in Tabla solo presentation transports the listeners to a different plane of energy while they are still engaged in the appreciation of the elaborate compositions. The monotony is broken by the artist's presentation of short and long fixed compositions like Tukda, Gat, Paran and chakradaars. The narration of these compositions makes them more effective and is of very special interest. The emphasis on phrases, the flow in a sentence with modulation and the pauses can be more effectively communicated verbally than through playing. Hence narration should be a part and parcel of such compositions.

Each composition has a unique impact on the listeners. These compositions are made of such syllables and phrases which have been composed not only merely scientifically but also have an inherent potential to trigger expressions of Nature and Human behavior or Activity. There is a need to dive into the aesthetical aspects of music in order to derive complete expression of such compositions. Mere mechanical play of these compositions would be only a scientific display of the art. If music has to reach out to the common mass, it needs a profound expression beyond the barriers of science by using Tabla language as a means to express the outburst of the soul. This is the onset of the magic or the charm of Music. Classical Music is a scientific skill and yet Music is a feeling beyond any Science. Extensive learning of the art, the virtuosity and the impeccable skill coupled with an exuberant flight of imagination do create the magic. Imparting knowledge of the aesthetical values of music is much needed now. The subject of Aesthetics should not merely remain in the Theory of Music as a Script. Though reading volumes on the Aesthetics of Music may provide you with knowledge and overview of the subject, yet the entire aesthetical display of music solely lies in the thinking, feeling and imagination of the artist.

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