

Exploring the Principles of Tabla Accompaniment in Hindustani Flute Recital

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Abstract

Tabla accompaniment is an attribute widely practiced in Hindustani classical music and recognized for its pivotal role in enhancing the overall performance. Notably, tabla accompaniment with instrumental music such as flute recital is very popular. It is noted that a separate study is required to fully understand the field of accompaniment. In case of research, significant studies in analyzing the aspects of tabla accompaniment have not been carried out. The fundamental concepts towards accompaniment of flute recital have been studied in this research.

In the study it is observed that the accompanist has to be proficient in individual core subject as well as has to have profound knowledge of the various styles of the art form to be accompanied. It is utmost important to listen to the musical forms of Hindustani classical music to develop musical sense and the discipline involved in accompaniment. The musical sense is the very first step towards fulfilling the requirement of the main art form. It also involves artistic mind and with an impromptu sense of creativity to elevate the performance. These are the core principles for a successful journey of tabla accompaniment in flute recital.

Keywords: Accompaniment, flute, tabla, taala, rhythm

Introduction:

The instrument tabla, which is considered as an important instrument in Hindustani classical music was developed for the purpose of accompaniment (Shukla, 2003). It is often said that the accompaniment involves more intricate work than performing a tabla solo. This is because the pattern of the solo performance is fixed and practiced in a standard format but the accompaniment is a spontaneous creation of art (Sairam, 2022). Each form has its own requirements of accompaniment based on its rendering style.

One of the instrumental forms in Hindustani classical music is the flute recital. It has been standing out due to its peculiar tonal quality and way of rendition. It has a unique softer tone and appealing nature. In case of flute recital, the tabla accompaniment is known for its engaging and creative exploration of rhythmic cycle. There is a greater scope for the tabla player to decorate the performance with his own skill and play individual pieces.

“Gayan Evam Vadan ki tabla Sangati Me Saundarya ka Vivechanatmak Adhyayan” by Nishant Kumar Singh, “The art of accompaniment in Indian classical music with special reference to instrumentalists” by Chitrant Pant are some of the studies which have been previously done. However, it is important to carry out a detailed study based on the practical aspect and list down the factors which lead to a successful accompaniment. Therefore, tabla accompaniment with flute recital becomes a subject to be studied in detail.

The following are the key points while accompanying flute recital.

1. Understanding of the style:

In the case of flute recital, there are two main styles of rendering, namely gayaki style and Gatkari style (Kumar Kasaudhan, 2019).

- **Gayaki style:**

This follows the pattern of the khayal style of gayaki. It was started in the 19th century by Pt. Pannalal Ghosh who is considered as the pioneer of Flute in Hindustani Classical Music (Sinh, 2024). This style evolved with time and established itself as one of the very prominent styles in flute recital. In this style, the traditional khayal bandishes are played mainly in vilambit ektal, teental or jhumra. As it is influenced by the bada khayal, the role of accompanist is to give a balanced rhythmic structure without playing any individual solos in between. Though the scope of playing individual solos is less in this case, it can depict the maturity of the accompanist as a well-versed accompanist will be able to do well within this limitation with subtle innovations within the framework that a keen ear will appreciate. It is followed by the chhota khayal bandish in which there are more opportunities to play solo pieces. Usually, as the bandish starts, the accompanist should start with a short solo followed by a tihai engaging the audience and boosting with an impactful start. This drut bandish usually ends with the jhala.

- **Gatkari style:**

In this style, popularized by Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia, initially the flautist starts with an aalap followed by a jod and then a jhala. This initial part is not accompanied on the tabla and is followed by the beginning of the Gat in vilambit or madhya laya. As the gat begins, the accompanist should take the opportunity to explore the canvas of the taala with his creativity based on the compositional form of tabla known as peshkar with upaj anga. Upaj anga is a spontaneous creation of musical ideas. At the end of this piece, playing a short tihai elevates the experience and adds to the curiosity and excitement in the audience. The tihai has to be structured in such a way that it lands on the starting point of the Gat which adds to a synchronized performance. Especially in the current musical set up, this pattern of catching up with the mukhda of the gat has become a primary expectation of the flautist as well as the audience.

2. Musical Sense:

Another important aspect is the musical sense. Understanding of the music is the very first step towards starting the journey of accompaniment. Flute recital has a soothing nature therefore accompaniment has to suit the music that is being rendered at that moment. As said by stalwarts of music, the art should come from within and has to be a subconscious response. For this to be achieved, listening to music is very important. It is said that every artist should listen to all the forms of Hindustani classical music as it is the foundation towards understanding and inheriting the musical sense. It is utmost important to listen to the flute recitals of the great maestros and carefully analyze the tabla accompaniment to be able to practically achieve the same. Understanding the discipline involved in the accompaniment that is accompaniment is meant for a supporting role and one should not showcase individual skills is very important.

3. Theka:

Theka is the rhythmic cycle which is based on the taala. In every form of music, it is important to establish the canvas of theka while accompanying (Saral, 2014). The theka gets established with a stable laya, suitable tonal quality, emphasis on the certain syllables and synchronization with the musical rendition. As many stalwarts have said, the theka has to be established in such a way that the main artist doesn't have to consciously focus on the rhythmic cycle. The tonal quality and balance of the theka is important in determining the balanced structure. In gayaki style, vilambit teental, ektal and jhumra are the thekas that are used followed by drut teental and ektal. In the Gat style, rupak, jhaptal, matta taal are used followed by drut teental or ektaal. Although these thekas are used in a tabla solo, there is a notable difference when they are used for the purpose of accompaniment. The accompanist must be well-versed with all these thekas from the accompaniment point of view.

4. Tonal quality:

This is perhaps the most important aspect. The volume of the theka should not overpower the recital (PANT, 2024). The sound that is produced when we play the certain syllables on the tabla is known as “Nikas”. Producing the right nikas is very important during the accompaniment. While accompanying flute recital, the syllables on the chaati or kinar of tabla have to be played delicately which adds to the aesthetic aspect and gives a greater scope for the flautist to establish the music. Especially when the flautist explores the shadja and pancham swara, it is very important to play the theka with a softer tone giving more scope for the music to get established. If the syllables on the kinar are prominently played, it might obstruct the overall nature of the musical performance and have a negative impact. However, it is important to have practice of playing the syllables with accuracy as the tabla used to accompany the flute is of higher note and has smaller diameter which makes it challenging.

5. Responsiveness:

In the recital, there are different patterns with respect to laya and different tihais that are played. The role of accompanist is to reproduce them in the next cycle. This indeed becomes a

conversation between the two performers. The accompanist must be well-versed with such calculated tihais and patterns. Also, it is very important to have a clear insight of the rhythmic cycle to be able to reproduce it with ease. After exploring the gat with aalap kriya, the artist explores further with taan kriya and layakari (Kumar Kasaudhan, 2019). There are various patterns of layakari that might be explored. For example, taala framework may be divided into four parts and in this pattern the flautist might improvise with his creativity. The accompanist must be able to improvise the same patterns in the next cycles.

6. Tabla solo piece:

The accompanist has greater scope to play solos in during the flute recital. This opportunity may be given multiple times in a single performance. This adds to the energy and creates a positive impact. The accompanist must be skilled enough and has to have enough repertoire in different types of laya. The compositional forms of tabla such as kayada and rela should be played. However, impromptu improvisation in these forms is expected as it is more appealing and engaging (PANT, 2024). Unlike the other forms such as vocal, the accompanist gets more time and scope to improvise the repertoire with his creativity.

7. Proficiency to play Teental in drut laya:

The flute recital ends with the jhala which is considered as the climax point of the performance due to its faster tempo. It is usually played in teental and ends with a cohesive tihai. This is considered as the toughest part from the accompaniment point of view. Therefore, it is important to be skilled enough to match the tempo of the flautist. This needs a separate and dedicated practice of teental in the faster tempo with its various patterns. With the increasing speed, maintaining the soft tonal balance of the theka is also important.

8. Jugalbandi:

An important and engaging aspect in the flute recital is the Jugalbandi. This involves to and fro nature of interaction between the flautist and the accompanist based on a certain pattern which is known as “Sawaal - Jawaab”. Towards the end of a performance, the flautist plays a musical pattern which is to be mimicked to portray the same idea through the language of tabla. Here, the accompanist has to have the qualities such as agility, creativity and skill to be able to get engaged in the musical conversation. This musical conversation may be of 10-12 cycles or more. Trying to mimic and play exact swaras through the variations done on the bayan adds to the aesthetic experience. Caution has to be exercised to not overdo this expression as the focus should not completely shift from the melodic exposition of the performance.

Conclusion:

The tabla plays an active supporting role in the flute recital as the rhythm never stops during the entire performance. Accompanying flute recitals is very challenging as there are various aspects that have to be taken into consideration. An accompanist must be well versed with the different rendering styles, thekas and understanding of the aesthetics in the flute recital to pair

it with a musical accompaniment. The tonal quality of flute is hollow and needs a crisp as well as apt accompaniment style. The capacity to play the tabla of higher note thereby needs special intricacies thereby beautifying the aspect of musicality in flute. Individual skill and musical sense both the attributes are must. The accompanist has to be alert to the patterns of laya explored by the flautist and has to respond cohesively. The short solos played by the tabla artist have to be in sync with the various grades of laya employed by the flautist. “Sangat” is the most intricate and unique expression of the art of tabla playing. Overall understanding of the nature of the instrument, style of rendition, creativity and musical sense are the foundations in the journey of accompaniment making it a spontaneous musical creation.

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