

# Essence of Rhythm in Indian Music

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## **Abstract:**

Rhythm refers to the arrangement of time in music. In addition to melody and harmony it is one of the fundamental elements of music. In fact, melody itself implies a pattern in time arising from the fact that the notes are played for different lengths of time. There is latent rhythm in every melody. The fact that we react almost instinctively to music either by clapping our hands or by tapping our feet is evidence of the existence of this time pattern.

**Keywords:** Rhythm, Tempo, Laya, tala, Percussion

Rhythm is the soul of Indian music. In music, the system of measuring the time is called rhythm. Rhythm is the basis of music in which song, dance and instrumental music get established. According to mythology rhythm which is otherwise called as tala in Indian subcontinent is originated from Lord Shiva's Tandava Nritya (Ta) and Goddess Parvati's Lasya Nritya (La). Together they form the term 'Tala'. In Indian music Sam plays a vital role in the music. Sam is an emphatic beat acting as a point of convergence or resolution in exceptional cases there is neither melodic release or rhythmic or textual stress on the first beat.

In fact, the strike on the drum head which is usually synchronized with the beat (sam), can at times also be after the beat (atita) or even before the beat (anagata) played after the beat, the note is said to express reluctance or doubt. Played on the beat it indicates precision and sobriety. While played before the beat it expresses joy, liveliness and vitality. In case of the sarang group of afternoon ragas there is no emphasis on the sam in order to create the languorous atmosphere reminiscent of the feeling experience during this part of the day.

In this context, it must also be mentioned that it is possible while singing or playing certain tālas like dādrā and kharawā or even Deepchandi, to double or even quadruple the tempo in a few cycles of the tāl in order to heighten the rhythmic appeal and this is referred to as laggi.

Thus, it is possible to introduce variations within the framework of the tāla, expanding, reducing and changing the basic stroking pattern. While these variations are, to some extent composed in advance and memorized by the tabla performer, they too permit of extempore composition namely peshkar, than, mohra, tukuda and kayada.

The variational compositions are distinguished from each other by the presence or absence of the cadential tihai which is a stroking pattern played three times in succession and is so timed that its last stroke falls on the Sam.

Although the various tālas and the manner in which time is structured by them have been discussed, their actual execution depends on laya, the meter or pulsation present in the music. Even in the rhythmic free floating parts such as ālāp, where there is no accompaniment by a percussion instrument there is a meter. The notion of proper timing which the development of the raga has to follow and the prescribed duration for each note, is laid down in these rules of Alap. Failure to do so would degenerate rāga into meaningless

sounds. The portion of music which is accompanied by a percussion instrument, their timing or pulsation becomes manifest and the term laya in this context is usually used to refer to both the implicit rhythmic principle, as present in the inherent meter, as well as to tempo, while täl is the external time structure imposed by means of the percussion instrument.

Indian music has three main tempo or laya each being twice as fast as the previous one.

These are the vilambit (slow) Madhya (medium) drut (fast) and their corresponding metromon speed 30 to 60mm, 60 to 120 mm and 120 – 140 mm respectively.

Sometimes, the term ‘ati’ meaning “very” can be prefixed as a further qualifier. Each section has its own proper laya which should be maintained, even though the artist can employ syncopation and ruba to increase the tempo to some degree to show his skill in the fast passage.

This aspect of laya is most basic. It is an important element in rhythmic patterning. A systematic and progressive increase in laya forms part of developing the rhythmic element which is just as important as the melodic development of the Raga through different kinds of äläp and badhat.

The basic tempo having an even and equal number of bols to each mätrā is known as barabar. That laya, usually at simplest level, has one bol in one mätrā but could even have two, four etc. When it has two bols to a mätrā it is known as double (digun) and when three as triple (tigun) and four as quadruple (chaugun). Besides this, it is also possible to have various multiples and fraction of bols per mätrā such as :

1. One and half (adi)
2. Multiples of two and half (kuadi)
3. Multiples of three and half (biad)

1. Adi : This is a one type of layakari and a prakar of chhanda. Adi laya is not an independent laya it is dependent on other laya. When chhaturmatrik chhanda is done to trimatric chhanda then the chhanda became bakra that is called adi laya.

Eg. 1 = i.e., 1 S 2 S 3 S

2. Kuad : This is also a special type of layakari and a prakar of chhanda. As Aad layakari formed from chatrumatrik chhanda, like wise kuad layakari also formed like that. is kuad layakari  
i.e. 1SSS2 SSS3S SS4SS S5SSS

3. Blad : It is also a prakar of chhanda. It is a special prakar of Aad layakari.

It also called paure dwigan layakar i.e. 7/4 is called Biad layakar. Eg.

1SSS2SSS 3SSS4SSS 5SSS6S SS7SSS

The above layakaries and prakar of chhanda can also played as a part of development and improvisation. In addition various patterns can also be created through the technique of laya banth (lit, laya-tempo banth-variation) which involves playing the composition in various speed, that is through rhythmic variations.

## RELATION OF CHHAND

Since there is no fixed association of any particular raga with a particular täl, any raga can be set to any täl.

While making analytical distinction for the purpose of understanding the process of integration, we can regard the rhythm as consisting of three elements.

1. The rhythm of the vocalist
2. The rhythm of tabla player.
3. The abstract täla.

It is that third element that provides the link between former as both the soloist and drummer have to keep this abstract tāla in their mind.

As far as the tabla player is concerned this is represented by the theka which he has learnt and plays almost automatically from memory. On the other hand, for the soloist there is really only one line in which all the notes are definitely arranged and in which the placement sam, khali and tali are clear. This is the first line of the sthayi which is the motif throughout the performance and is known as the mukhdā in case of thumri. One cycle (avartan) of the tāla which is repeated over and over again in order to enable the drummer to play the solo. However the important point is that they both (soloist and drummer) come together because of one common element that is Sam. Another way of viewing this would be to visualize the tāla as a structure that is articulated both rhythmically and melodically and the mukhada or lehara as a melodic counterpart of the tāla.

In case of drupad, the entire composition is set to tāla. Even in the case of khayal singing, the bandish is taught in a fully metered manner, with each syllable being tied to swara and mātrā.

### **Development of tala and laya**

There is an organized and harmonized system behind the gigantic phenomena of the universe and everything in it, the sun, the moon, the stars and satellites are unceasingly working through an ordered system. Everything phenomenal is ruled by the inevitable law of cause and consequence. This law is again guided by a universal law, which is known as the cosmic law or divine, energy.

The tala and laya are the inherent categories of that cosmic energy or Nature, which is otherwise known as prakriti, Prajñā kundalini, kamakala and mahamaya.

According to Rabindranath Tagore “chhanda is not merely measured blending of words, but significant adjustment of ideas, in a music of thoughts produced by subtle principle of distribution, which is not primarily logical but evidential.

A ‘chhanda’ connotes the idea of an ordered and measured motion (gati). This gives an idea of a harmonious restriction or system of time whereas ‘laya’ connotes that of time unit in the sense of pace or duration of speed.

Some are of the opinion that in the primitive day’s men and women used to sing and dance irregularly, clapping their hands, moving their feet and shaking their heads or limbs of the bodies. Their irregular movements of the hands, legs and heads or limbs of the bodies were gradually regulated and balanced with senses of restriction of pace and speed and they at last gave rise to concrete ideas of chhanda and laya.

In western music this, chhanda and laya is otherwise called rhythm and tempo.

Both have their common origin and basic ground in space and time, which is known as the prime factor of creation i.e. projection of the world appearance.

It is said in Rig Veda that there was no vibration or movement in the beginning and eternal calmness reigned supreme with unbroken silence. Gradually movement came into being in form of rhythmic vibration. The vibrations were organized, balanced and the manifold creation or projection was designed in a systematic form which may be called chhanda or rhythm.

The word ‘tapath of the upanisad was no other than the heat energy or will power of the divine primordial energy. Potential divine energy or Éçvara was alone before the projection of the phenomenon. He willed to be many and that will is the cause of world manifestation. Therefore the world of appearance came into

being in the form of rhythm or chhanda. The rhythm or chhanda was continuous external and the sun, moon stars and all other satellities of the solar system also observe the rhythmic movement.

### **Philosophical Conception of Tala and Laya**

Tala is considered as the intellectual side of music whereas melody is its sensuous aspect.

Edward Macdowell opines that chhanda denotes a thought as well as its vital part is intention and power. It plays the role of eternal succession of time.

Rhythm connotes the idea of tāla or beating of time. It has been defined that the word tāla came into being from the word tāla or kartala i.e. palms of the hands. In primitive time, the simple-hearted people used to sing and dance and measure of time by clapping or hands, and it seems that from the clapping of hands i.e. kartali, the word tāla evolved.

We know that time is considered as superior to space, as space. It can be said that two units of time (or moment) give rise to the idea of pace or space.

Samuel Alexander observes that neither is time without space, nor a space without time, and so time and space are co-existent. Time in itself not perceivable but for its parts or divisions like “Kala”, “Kastha”, “namesa”, “muhurta” etc. It is perceived as material objects. Besides space in its very nature is temporal and time, spatial.

In Atharva-veda, kala or time is conceived as horse with as saptasua. The asua or horse in no other than the rays of the sun. So the conception of time is connected with the sun, and it is a fact that we get the idea of time (morning, midday), evening from the sun.

In the Ahirabudhnya Samihita, one of the texts of the panchatantra literature, kala or time is mentioned with (guna) variety and niyati (destiny), kala and guna exist in the womb of Sakti or Prakriti. This prakriti is the primordial energy which gives rise to the idea of eternal kala or time as well as of desa or space.

In fact, the twin aspect time is space which gives rise to the conception of lays or tempo. The abstract space is an absolute reality which is known as the mahakala. Mahakala becomes divine energy when it assumes the dance of dynamicity. Dynamic energy manifests as innumerable time units of the measureless space which is static.

This static akasa or space is conceived as mahakala siva. Therefore mahakala and divine energy-space and time form the world of eternity.

### **Conclusion:**

Vedanta admitted the fact that kala (time and space) are the background of the cosmic order. In music, time and space-Tala and laya play an important role for creating a systematic order and also for controlling and beautifying the art of nāṭya, gēta and vādyā. In fact Tala and laya-time and tempo for measuring the immeasurable eternal length and breadth of the manifestation of the entire art. Besides, there are grades of manifestation of the entire art. Besides, there are grades of the manifestation of rhythm and tempo or laya which are known as slow (Bilambita) medium (Madhyam) and fast (druta) and these grades or motion (gatis) create different psychological influences in the minds of both the artists and the audiences. The slow motion of rhythm and tempo creates calmness and balanced attitude of mind.

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