

## Analysis of Rhythmic Aspect in Gharanas of Hindustani Music

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### Abstract

The Gharana system in Indian classical music is not just a method of categorizing different styles; it's a vibrant, evolving tradition that honors the unique contributions of musical maestros. These schools of music, distinguished by their distinct rhythmic patterns and melodic structures, offer a rich tapestry of history and innovation. As one explores the depths of Gharanas, they encounter a world where each beat and note encapsulates the spirit of centuries-old wisdom and the ongoing journey of musical discovery. The Gharanas of Indian classical music, each with their own preferred Talas, have cultivated unique styles of Khyal rendition. These styles are distinguished by their individual approaches to rhythm and melody, with the Agra Gharana incorporating Dhrupad-Dhamar influences into Khyal. The Gwalior, Jaipur, and Kirana Gharanas also stand out for their distinct juxtaposition on note and rhythm, contributing to the richness of Khyal music. This exploration of Laya-Tala practices of Gharana offers insight into the intricate rhythmic patterns and aesthetic principles that define the Khyal gharanas. This paper aims to delve into the nuanced Laya-Tala practices of these four major Gharanas, that affect their elaborative methods, aesthetic preferences, and their impact on the practice of Khyal idiom.

**Key words-** Gharana, Gwalior Gharana, Agra Gharana, Jaipur Gharana, Kirana Gharana, rhythm, Tala

### **Introduction -**

Rhythm is a fundamental aspect of our existence, deeply embedded in the fabric of nature and human expression. It is the underlying current that orchestrates the dance of celestial bodies and the subtle sway of flora. In the realm of fine arts, rhythm transcends auditory boundaries, influencing the visual impact of paintings and the form of sculptures. It is a potent language that communicates the artist's intent and evokes emotion. In music, dance, and poetry, rhythm is not merely an element; it is the backbone that structures the flow and enhances the narrative. As rhythms evolve, they carry with them the echoes of ancient impulses, pierce the conscious levels of thoughts and feelings. The rhythm creates the feeling of being in sink, loop, returning to the origin. It also breaks the monotony and infuses new surprising elements and creative ideas. Rhythm, in its essence, is the pulse of creativity, driving the completion of artistic visions and the continuous cycle of inspiration.

The concept of rhythm, or 'Laya,' is indeed universal, transcending cultural and musical boundaries. It is the foundational element that organizes time in music, allowing for the creation of patterns and structures. On the other hand, 'Tala' is a concept deeply rooted in Indian classical music. It refers to a rhythmic cycle that contains a specific number of beats, ranging from the simple to the complex, and is essential for the creation of Indian music. The excerpt

from 'Sangeet Ratnakar,' an ancient Sanskrit text on music and drama, poetically illustrates the significance of 'Tala.'

मुख-प्रधान- देहस्य नासिका मुख-मध्यके |  
तालहीनं तथा गीतं नासाहीनं मुखं यथा <sup>1</sup>

It compares the absence of 'Tala' in music to a face without a nose, emphasizing that just as a nose is central to a face, 'Tala' is central to music. This analogy beautifully conveys the idea that 'Tala' is not just a rhythmic component but a vital feature that gives music its identity and expression, much like a nose that gives character to a face. The text underscores the integral role of 'Tala' in giving music its aesthetic appeal and completeness.

Tala is a rhythmic cycle comprising a series of beats, or 'matras,' organized into groups, which can range from as few as one to as many as 112, as mentioned in ancient Indian treatises.<sup>2</sup> The evolution of Tala, particularly with the advent of Nibaddha Sangeet—a structured form of music with improvisation—has been significant in shaping the diverse musical expressions in Indian classical music. Talas like Teen Taal, with 16 matras, and Jhap Taal, with 10 matras, are not just timekeepers but also creative spaces within which artists perform intricate rhythmic and melodic patterns with improvisations.

The symbiotic relationship between Laya and Tala in Indian classical music is a testament to the genre's rich cultural tapestry. Laya, the natural tempo, serves as the pulse of a composition, while Tala, the rhythmic cycle, provides the intellectual framework within which this pulse operates. The evolution of Tala from the simple to the complex, as documented in ancient treatises, reflects the deepening of musical expression and the increasing sophistication of audience engagement over time. The Avartan, or the cyclical repetition of a Tala, is not merely a metrical count but a canvas for the musician's creativity. It is within the confines of this cycle that the artist weaves intricate patterns, playing with the tempo, and often, challenging expectations of audience to arrive at the Sama, in a manner that is surprising as well as satisfying.

The Khyal idiom, in particular, showcases the dynamic interplay of Laya and Tala. Here, the Avartan becomes a playground for the musician's imagination, where each rendition of the cycle can be a unique exploration of rhythm and melody. The challenge lies not only in adhering to the intellectual rigor of the Tala but also in infusing each Avartan with an aesthetic quality that resonates with the listener. The excitement for the audience is palpable as they anticipate the artist's return to Sama, the culmination of a journey through rhythm and time. This anticipation and the eventual fulfilment form the crux of the Khyal performance, making it a thrilling experience.

The Gharanas, or schools of music, each with their preferred Talas, have developed distinctive styles of Khyal elaboration that have become their trademarks. These styles are characterized by the Gharanas' unique approach to Tala exploration, where the same rhythmic cycle is interpreted and presented in distinct ways. The exploration of Laya-Tala in the Khyal idiom by various Gharanas has led to a rich diversity of rhythmic patterns and styles. For instance, the Agra Gharana is known for its distinctive approach to rhythm, integrating elements of Dhrupad-Dhamar into Khayal and emphasizing the role of rhythmic structures and Tabla accompaniment in its performances. The Gwalior, Jaipur, and Kirana Gharanas, each with their unique emphasis on swara and laya, have also contributed significantly to the

evolution of Khyal singing. This paper aims to delve into the nuanced Laya-Tala practices of these four majors Gharanas, shedding light on their elaborative methods, aesthetic preferences, and their impact on the practice of Khyal idiom.

### *Observations/Analysis -*

**Aesthetics classification of Gharanas on the basis of Rhythm orientations** - The classification of Gharanas in Indian classical music is a nuanced subject that intertwines the aesthetic orientations of rhythm and melody. Esteemed musicologists like Pt. Govindrao Tembe, Pt. V.H. Deshpande, and Dr. Ashok Ranade have contributed significantly to this discourse, each offering unique perspectives on the matter. Pt. Tembe's work, for instance, underscores the intrinsic value of Laya (rhythm) in the structural integrity of a Gharana's musical identity<sup>3</sup>, while Pt. Deshpande's classifications hinge on the relative emphasis a Gharana places on Laya (rhythm) vis-à-vis Swar (melody)<sup>4</sup>. Dr. Ranade's approach further sophisticates this classification by examining the processes and tendencies through which Gharanas juxtapose melody and rhythm, suggesting employment of expansion or intensification within their stylistic expressions.<sup>5</sup>

The four orientations of rhythm in Khyal elaboration—namely, the Tala played on Tabla (number of Matras), the rhythmic pattern of Theka, the rhythm of melodic phrases, and the tempo of Tala (Vilambit, Madhya, Drut)—are critical in understanding the aesthetic preferences of a Gharana.

1. The Tala being & Total number of matras in a cycle) :- The Gharanas have their preferred Talas. These Talas have definite number of beats (matras) and thus decides the length of Canvas. The Tala, with its total number of matras, serves as the foundational grid upon which the edifice of a performance is constructed.
2. The Tempo of Tala - The tempo of a tala plays a pivotal role in shaping the performance. The Khyal genre, known for its flexibility and improvisation, employs bandishes (compositions) that can span a spectrum of tempos, from the very slow ati vilambit to the swift ati drut. The choice of tempo is not arbitrary but a deliberate decision that influences the entire recital's structure and mood. For instance, the Gwalior and Agra gharanas opt for a moderately slow (Madhya Vilambit) Jhoomra tala, while the Kirana and Indore gharanas may prefer a very slow, ati vilambit pace. This tempo selection is crucial as it dictates the space between beats (matras), which in turn determines the potential for melodic elaboration within those beats. A slower tempo allows for a more intricate and ornate exploration of the raga, providing the artist with a broader canvas to weave complex melodic patterns. Conversely, as the tempo increases, the melodic phrases tend to become more straightforward and direct. Interestingly, while the tempo in drut khyals may converge across different Gharanas, the rhythmic interplay and interpretation exhibit a diversity, reflecting each Gharana's unique stylistic nuances and philosophical approach to rhythm and melody.
3. The rhythmic pattern of Theka –Theka, essentially, is the skeletal rhythmic framework within a Tala. Talas like Teental and Tilwada may share the same number of beats, in this case, 16, but they are distinguished by their Theka, which is the specific pattern of bols (syllables) used to express the Tala. The Theka for Teental, for instance, is characterized by a certain arrangement of bols that create its unique identity, whereas

Tilwada, although it shares the same beat count, will have a different arrangement of bols, giving it a distinct feel, sound & grid for structure.

The division of beats and the segmentation into Khand add layers of complexity, allowing for nuanced exploration of the melodic structure. These divisions help in creating a dynamic interplay between rhythm and melody, enabling the performer to explore the melodic contours within the rhythmic cycle. The bols serve as the primary articulators of rhythm, while the beat division provides a framework for timing and pacing. The Khand division, which segments the Tala into smaller sections, offers a structure within which the melody can be developed and varied. Together, these elements allow for a rich and varied exploration of melody. Moreover, a particular Theka to take its shape demands a certain speed. The bols (syllables), the division of beats, the division of segment (khand) together decide, how melodic structure could be explored in the given theka.

4. The rhythm of melodic phrases - The rhythm of melodic phrases in Indian classical music is a complex interplay of various elements that contribute to the unique character of each raga. The repetitive accentuation of certain swaras (notes) at consistent intervals introduces rhythm into melodic phrases, which is further nuanced by the intrinsic demands of each raga for a particular speed or tempo. For instance, ragas such as Puriya Dhanashree, Shree, and Gauri, despite sharing the same set of swaras, necessitate distinct speeds for their melodic phrases. The rules governing a raga—such as the elongation or shortening of notes (Alpatva, Bahutva)—and the use of specific embellishments (like Andolan, Gamak, Behlava, Kana) etc are artistically employed to create melodic phrases that have intrinsic rhythmic orientation. These melodic phrases with intrinsic rhythm orientations interact with the Theka of the tala.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, each Gharana has its own preferred set of ragas and talas, which facilitates the elaboration of ragas that align with the Gharana's stylistic preferences, including the speed of melodic phrases within the preferred Talas. Ultimately, the artist's aesthetical perspective for selection of tempo can influence the overall exploration of Raga & elaboration of Khyal.

The above-mentioned four rhythm-oriented elements, when harmonized, not only define the structure of the performance but also reflect the Gharana's unique interpretation of the Khyal genre. This intricate system of rhythmic modulation within Indian classical music showcases the genre's capacity for both adherence to tradition and creative improvisation. The Gharanas have chosen their aesthetic take on how to employ these elements to create unique format of their Khyal rendition. This has resulted in their unique styles of Khyal rendition known as Gharanas. (The melodic elaboration of Khyal is an equally important aspect of Khyal exposition. However, the scope of this paper does not include it.)

The classification based on rhythm orientations not only enriches our understanding of the Gharanas but also serves as a testament to the diversity and depth of Indian classical music. This classification system, therefore, is not merely an academic exercise but a celebration of the living tradition of Khyal idiom, which continues to evolve and resonate with practitioners and connoisseurs alike. As we delve deeper into the study of Gharanas, we uncover layers of rhythmic sophistication and melodic beauty, each layer revealing the ingenuity and creativity of the maestros who have shaped this art form over centuries.

### **Gwalior Gharana -**

The interpretation of Khyal of Gwalior style is deeply intertwined with the Laya (tempo) and melody it employs, with Tilwada emerging as the Tala of choice. This preference for Tilwada, characterized by a Madhya-Vilambit tempo ranging from 22 to 50 beats per minute, shapes the Gharana's musical expression. The moderately slow (Madhya Vilambit) pace allows for melodic phrases that are straightforward, eschewing complexity in favor of clarity and directness.

In the Gwalior tradition, there is a harmonious relationship between the bols (rhythmic syllables) of the Theka and the accentuation of melodic phrases. This synergy is particularly evident during the elaboration of Vilambit Khyal, where the division of a single matra (beat) into two or four parts within the Theka of Tala Tilwada injects a sense of excitement and luminosity into the performance. The laya of Vilambit Khyal adheres to a Madhya Vilambit pace, further reinforcing the Gharana's stylistic identity.

The medium-slow tempo of Tilwada, referred to as Madhya-vilambit laya, possesses a well-defined contour and structure as some beats (matras) are further divided into 2 or four sections with DhaGe / TiRaKiTa / KatDhin. The interplay between the accents of melodic phrases and the rhythmic patterns of Theka enhances the beauty of a performance. This synergy is what makes renditions of Gwalior Gharana vibrant and engaging. The maestros of Gwalior Gharana navigate the structure of Tala with great mindfulness. They meticulously craft the cycle of Tala (avartan), taking into account the segments of Tala (Khand) and the interplay between Khaali (unvoiced beat segment) and Bhari (Voiced beats segment), lending their style a robust and well-constructed form. Behlava, an embellishment that allows for the free-flowing interweaving of melody and rhythm is used generously. The practitioners of this Gharana exhibit a profound adeptness in Laykari, the artful manipulation of rhythm, which is a testament to their skill and deep understanding of rhythmic intricacies.

The Khyal performance in the mentioned Gharana is a structured progression through 4 tempo changes.

1. The initial phase, Vilambit tempo, sets a reflective pace where the Bandish is rendered, followed by Alapi exploring Raga that adheres to the Tala's structure.
2. As the performance transitions to the second phase, the tempo escalates, doubling the speed of melodic phrases in relation to the Tala, often referred to as 'dugun'. This phase allows for the expressive use of Gamak and Behlava, while medium-paced Bol alaps and succinct Taan phrases enrich the rendition, demonstrating the intricate relationship between rhythm and melody in Indian classical music.
3. The third phase often sees an increase in tempo, with the performance of Taans and Boltaans that create intricate rhythmic patterns. The artists remain acutely aware of the Tala's structure throughout. Creative use of Tihai is made all through the performance.
4. The fourth phase, known as Drut Khyal, marks a shift where the focus transitions from melodic to rhythmic elaboration. Here, Boltaans are aligned with the Tala in various tempos like Dugun and Chaugun, culminating in a display of rhythmic virtuosity through swift Taans, bringing the performance to an exhilarating close.

This progression not only showcases the performer's technical skill but also their deep understanding of the Raga's emotional essence and the Tala's structural integrity. Thus, Gwalior

Gharana's approach to Khyal is not merely a technical endeavor but a philosophical one as well, reflecting a reverence for the time-honored traditions of Indian classical music.

### **Agra Gharana -**

The Agra gharana, is renowned for its emphasis on rhythmic (Tala) improvisation. This gharana's approach to Khyal singing is particularly distinguished by its intricate Laykari, which is the art of rhythmic play. The tempo, typically Madhya Vilambit, allows for a measured and deliberate exposition of the melodic phrases, which are rendered with clarity and precision rather than complexity. The Khyal performances in the Agra style are methodically structured into two main segments: the Pre-Tala or Pre-Bandish segment and the Post-Tala or Bandish segment.

In the Pre-Bandish segment, the performer delves deeply into the Raga, unbound by the rhythmic cycle of the Tala. This allows for a free-flowing exploration of the Raga, utilizing syllables such as Nom, tom, ritanana, and tanana. These syllables are carefully chosen for their mix of fluid vowels and sharp consonants, which facilitate the Layakari even in the absence of a defined Tala cycle. The exploration of the Raga in this segment traverses through varying tempos, starting from slow, moving to medium, and often culminating in a fast tempo.

The Raga is explored exhaustively in pre Bandish segment. Hence, in the Post-Bandish segment, the Tala becomes highlight of the performance. Here, the Bandish, which is a fixed composition, is introduced and the Raga is further developed within the framework of the Tala cycle. The artist skillfully weaves the Raga's melodic patterns with the Tala's rhythmic structure, showcasing the hallmark Layakari of the Agra gharana.

The Agra style is characterized by a deep understanding and control over Tala, as evidenced by the seamless integration of the bols of Theka—the rhythmic pattern played on the tabla—and the accentuation of the melodic phrases. This synergy creates a distinctive musical narrative that is both structured and expressive. The artists' command over various Talas, such as Teentala, Ektala, Tilwada, and Jhoomra, is a testament to their rhythmic expertise. This proficiency is further demonstrated in their conscious design of the Tala cycle, or avartan, taking into account the segments of Tala, known as Khand, and the alternating emphasis on Khaali and Bhari beats, which adds a dynamic ebb and flow to the performance.

In the Agra style, the concept of Layakari, or rhythmic variation, is not confined to the Bola ang—where the bols are articulated—but extends to the Taan and Bol Taan, which are rapid and elaborate melodic movements. This approach to Layakari showcases the artist's virtuosity in rhythmic improvisation, making the Agra style renowned for its complex and intricate rhythmic play. Once the Bol starts with particular rhythmic pattern, the entire cycle is designed with the same rhythmic pattern, even the Mukhada is transformed to this pattern to arrive at Sam.<sup>7</sup> The free use of creative Tihais is one of the features of Agra Gharana. The segment of Bol often features complex rhythmic patterns and interplay between the singer and the percussionist, highlighting the gharana's unique contribution to the rhythmic aspect of Khyal singing.

As the performance progresses, the tempo of the Tala may be increased according to the artist's creative vision. This gradual acceleration adds to the intensity and excitement of the performance, challenging both the artist and the listener to engage with the evolving rhythmic

landscape. The Agra style's emphasis on rhythm, coupled with the nuanced treatment of melody, makes it a compelling and sophisticated expression of Indian classical music, reflecting a rich cultural heritage and a deep-rooted tradition of musical excellence.

### **Jaipur Gharana -**

The Jaipur Gharana is renowned for its meticulous attention to both the melodic and rhythmic facets of Khyal. This gharana's preference for Teen-Tala, a rhythmic cycle of sixteen beats, is a testament to its dedication to the slow and deliberate exposition of raga characteristics. The tempo of Teen-Tala in the Jaipur style, typically ranging from 19 to 30 beats per minute, allows for the construction of complex melodic patterns that are rich in detail and nuance, akin to the delicate work of filigree.

In the realm of Khyal, the Jaipur Gharana excels with its Vilambit (slow tempo) Khyal Bandishes (compositions), which are intricately woven into the fabric of the Tala, ensuring that each beat is meticulously considered. This approach results in a performance where the tempo established for the Vilambit Khyal remains constant, eschewing the common practice of accelerating the tempo during the elaboration of the Khyal or during the execution of Bols or Tanas (fast-paced improvisations).

A distinctive characteristic of the Jaipur style is its use of Aada Laya, an approach where the emphasis is placed off the beat, creating a syncopated, swinging rhythmic pattern. This is achieved by accentuating fractions of the beat, such as half, one-third, one-quarter, one-sixth, or one-eighth, which adds a unique swing to the rhythm. Jaipur style prefers singing in Talas that have evenly spaced beats (matras) where the syllables of Theka might be subdivided further, the Jaipur Gharana maintains a uniform distribution of syllables within the Tala structure. Such Theka of evenly spaced beats having single syllable (Bols) (eg Dha, Dhin...) facilitates ada layakari or syncopated rhythm.

In addition to Teen-Tala, the Jaipur Gharana also employs other Talas like Rupak (a seven-beat cycle) and Jhaptala (a ten-beat cycle), chosen for their equal-distance Bols (syllables) Thekas, which align with the gharana's stylistic preferences. The Vilambit Khyal renditions in these Talas are a hallmark of the Jaipur Gharana, setting it apart from other schools where such slow-tempo Khyals in Rupak or Jhaptala are rarely performed.

The rhythmic articulation in the Jaipur style, while subtle, is imbued with a quiet intelligence that contrasts with the more aggressive rhythmic interplay found in the Agra or Gwalior gharanas. This nuanced approach to rhythm, coupled with the gharana's sophisticated melodic constructions, contributes to the rich tapestry of Indian classical music and underscores the enduring legacy of the Jaipur Gharana in shaping the evolution of Khyal singing.

### **Kirana Gharana -**

The Kirana Gharana places a significant emphasis on the melodic aspects of Raga, often prioritizing it over rhythmic elements. This approach imbues performances with a contemplative quality, as the gradual unfolding of the Raga becomes the central focus. The Kirana style is characterized by its meticulous development of the Raga, employing delicate ornamentations that enhance the melodic structure and beauty. By slowing down the tempo of the Tala, the rhythmic cycle, performers are afforded greater freedom in their melodic expression. This deceleration, particularly evident in the Vilambit Khyals performed in slow

tempos of Tala Ektala and Jhoomara, stretches the intervals between the beats (matras), providing a spacious auditory canvas for the artist. The elongated temporal space allows for an in-depth exploration of the Raga's nuances without the constraints imposed by a faster tempo.

The Kirana Gharana's distinctive approach to Raga performance has been shaped by its illustrious lineage of musicians, who have contributed to its rich legacy. These artists have not only mastered the traditional techniques but have also infused their performances with innovative interpretations of Saragam, the singing of musical notes. The Gharana's focus on melodic exploration encourages a meditative listening experience, where the audience is invited to immerse themselves in the intricate tapestry of sound. The slow tempo serves as a meditative pulse, guiding the listener through the evolving landscape of the Raga. The Kirana Gharana's emphasis on melodic richness over rhythmic complexity allows for a more introspective and personal interpretation of the Raga, making each performance a unique journey through sound.

### ***Result / Summary***

Tala provides a framework for musicians to explore their creativity within a structured cycle. Different Gharana have unique approaches to explore rhythm and Tala. Each Gharana has preferred Talas and tempos, influencing their style of Khyal rendition. The rhythmic aspects, such as total number of beats in Tala, Theka patterns, rhythmic orientation of melodic phrase, and tempo, are essential in understanding a Gharana's aesthetic preferences. These elements contribute to the unique musical expression and performance style that distinguishes one Gharana from another.

The Gwalior Gharana's approach to Khyal singing is a testament to the nuanced interplay of rhythm and melody. Tala Tilwada, with its moderate pace, allows for a clear and direct melodic expression, while the division of beats within the rhythmic cycle adds a dynamic quality to the performance. This tradition emphasizes the importance of Laykari, showcasing the artist's mastery over rhythmic patterns and their ability to weave melody and rhythm into a cohesive and engaging musical narrative. The Agra emphasizes rhythmic improvisation and intricate Layakari. This style showcases a mastery over Tala, as seen in the seamless blend of Theka bols and melodic phrases, making it a unique and respected tradition in the world of classical music. The signature use of Teen-Tala by Jaipur Gharna showcases a commitment to exploring the depths of ragas through a slow, methodical pace, allowing for an intricate and nuanced melodic development. The gharana's performances are marked by a steady tempo, even during the most elaborate improvisations, and a unique rhythmic swing brought about by the off-beat emphasis of Aada Laya. The Kirana Gharana values the slow and deliberate development of the Raga, allowing for a deep exploration of its nuances. The use of slower tempos in Tala provides artists with the freedom to delve into intricate melodic ornamentations, creating a contemplative and immersive listening experience. Thus, understanding Gharana based on rhythm orientations is not merely an academic exercise but a celebration of the living tradition of Indian classical music, which continues to evolve and resonate with practitioners and connoisseurs alike. As we delve deeper into the study of Gharanas, we uncover layers of rhythmic sophistication and melodic beauty, each layer revealing the ingenuity and creativity of the maestros who have shaped this art form over centuries.

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