



THE APPLICATION OF TABLA IN HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

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ABSTRACT:

Tabla must have been in existence in India for many many years – at least during the reign of Allaudin Khilji (1296 to 1316). It is believed that Table is the contribution of the Mughals to our Music. This is a contentious issue, as we know that the Pushkar was in existence long before even the Pakhawaj. It is quite likely that an instrument resembling the Tabla was in existence even before the Mughal invasion. But it is definite that the use of the Tabla was accentuated during the Mughal rule, when Dhruv-pad(Dhrupad) tradition of singing gradually gave way to Khayal singing. The Dhruv-pads were songs, all in praise of the pantheon of Hindu Gods. These were replaced by khayal singing in which the compositions sung were mainly in praise of the King and were not robust as Dhrupad singing. This entailed a softer and subtler accompaniment. This is where the Tabla got its importance.

KEY WORDS: Tabla, Music, Rhythm, Melody, Swara, Laya.

The word Tabla has come from the Arabic word “Tabl” which is the equivalent name for percussion instruments. Hence, we have varieties of instruments having names like “Tabl-Balaadi”, “Tabl-Turky”, “Tabl-Jung”, “Tabl-Saami”, “Tabl-Mirgi”, etc.

Table must have come into greater use during the period 1210 to 1247, which also happens to be the period in which the “Sangeet Ratnakar” was written by Sharang Dev, the son of a Minister in the Kingdom of Devagiri.

In the period before 400 A.D. there was a uniform system of music across the length and breadth of India. From the treatises of Sage Bharat-Muni (Natya Shastra) and Shaarang Dev (Sangeet Ratnakar), it seems that this was the case till 1290 A.D. In this period, “Swar” and “Laya” i.e.: Melody and Rhythm, were accorded equal importance. Thus, any musician was equally comfortable in both – which, sadly is not the case today. Although in the Carnatic Tradition and to some extent in the Dhrupad Tradition, Vocalists and Instrumentalists are quite aware – infact very much so – of the Taals involved and being played during their performances. Khayal singing, laid too much emphasis on the “Swar” development, to the detriment of the “Taal” aspect.

Sppositions differ regarding the invention and evolution of the drum set called Tabla. Some are of the opinion that it came from the Persian instrument known as “Tabel”. Others believe, splitting the Pakhawaj into two halves to make the instrument less sonorous and more lyrical

derived it. Many believe that during the reign of Allaudin Khilji, his court musician Amir Khusru gave birth to the modern Tabla.

According to Dr. Arun Kumar Sen, there was a famous Pakhawaj player known as Rahaman Khan during the reign of Mohammed II (1734 A.D). Rahaman Khan's son Amir Khan learnt the art of Kheyal singing from a musician known as Sadarang. It was Amir Khan who devised Tabla to suite his Kheyal singing. The then existing drums like the pakhawaj or the Mridangam were far too sonorous and less lyrical thus unsuitable as an accompanying instrument for subtle vocal styles like the Kheyal or the Thumri.

According to yet another scholar, during the reign of Mohammed Shah Rangila, one Niyamat Khan (alias Sadarang) was an eminent musician. It was Sadarang's youngest brother Khusro Khan, who fountainhead the Tabla.

With the refinement and advancement of subtle vocal forms like the Khayal and the Thumri, it was felt necessary to have a more resplendent percussion drum having better tonal qualities. Pakhawaj and Mridangam, which have a longer air-column and skin on both sides of the instrument, proved to be far too noisy and were unsuitable as accompanying drums for subtler vocal forms of music. It was this necessity that led to the development of the modern Tabla by splitting the pakhawaj into two halves. On the basis of above mentioned, it can be estimated that modern Tabla originated during the early eighteenth century.

In whatever way the development of Tabla took place and whosoever may have invented it, history states that the first person to develop and propagate the modern Tabla was the famous Tabla player from Delhi known as SIDHAR KHAN. It was Sidhar Khan who first started adapting and using the various rhythmic pattern and Boles (pronounced Bowls) of the Pakhawaj for playing on the Tabla. Sidhar Khan founded the Delhi Gharana or the Delhi Stylistic School of Tabla playing. He taught and popularized the Tabla in a colossal way and his family members and disciples learnt the art from him and later settled in various parts of India. It was his disciples who further popularized the Tabla and commenced several other Gharanas throughout India.

The Tabla comprises two tuned drums, which are placed vertically and played with the hands. The Dahina(lit. right hand:also called Dayan or Tabla) is a slightly flared, closed cylindrical drum carved from a solid block of wood (Kar or Lakhnau), the narrower end of which is partly hollowed and is covered with a composite head(Puri). It stands between 24cm. and 30cm. in height and has a diameter at the neck between 12cm. and 15cm. The Bayan (lit. left hand:also called Duggi) is a modified hemispherical kettledrum commonly made of clay, copper or brass. It stands between 22cm. and 28cm. in height and its slightly narrowed neck, also covered with a composite head, measures between 20cm. and 23cm. in diameter. Each head is made from a circular piece of treated goatskin partly covered by a second skin that is trimmed away to form a rim (Kinar or Kani) around its circumference. The lower skin, whose central portion is left exposed, is called the Maidan (also Lav). Both skins are laced to a ring (Gajra, Pagri or Singar) that fits tightly over the neck. The black spots (Siyahi) about 7cm. in diameter are made up of a paste containing iron filings. These black spots or Siyahi placed centrally on the Dahina and eccentrically on the Baan, give the drums its pitch and resonance. Taken together, the Maidan and Siyahi of the Dahina are often termed the 'Sur'). The heads are laced with hide thongs (Baddhi), and the Dahina is tunable by a combination of adjusting a number of cylindrical wooden wedges (Gutta or Goli) to increase or decrease the general tension of the head and by tapping the Gajra

with a small hammer (Hathaun) for finer tuning. The Dahina is tuned to the first, fourth or fifth degree of the scale in use, while the Bayan is pitched at an imprecise low note that the player can modify, by wrist position and pressure, in order to add inflexion to the 'voice' of the drums. Both drums are placed upon rings (Birha, Indwi or Adhar) that provide stability during playing.

The various Gharanas or stylistic schools of Tabla playing have been dealt with in a separate chapter. The maestros of each Gharana, their distinctive and identifiable style of Tabla playing, etc, needs a separate chapter by itself or it would be a bit difficult for the reader to comprehend the nuances of the different Gharanas at this stage. Several names attached to a number of the Tabla's constituent parts, and no consensus of opinion exists to a 'correct' set of terms. This is probably because of the large number of languages and dialects in vogue in a vast country that greater undivided India was and still is.

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