

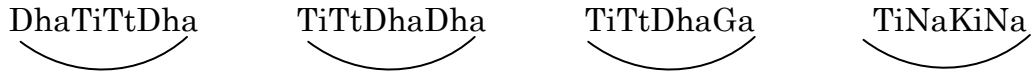
Tabla Kal-Akshar Notation System

Introduction

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Pandit Bhatkhande¹ and Pandit Paluskar² developed the traditional Tabla notation system in the previous century. We are using these notation systems since its inception. However, these two notations systems are incomplete. For example, our basic Delhi Kayda³ “DhaTiTt DhaTiTt DhaDhaTiTt DhaGaTiNaKiNa”⁴ (धातिट धातिट धाधातिट धागतिनकिन) will be written in Pt. Bhatkhande Notation system as

DhaTiTtDha TiTtDhaDha TiTtDhaGa TiNaKiNa



To show four Matras⁵ of the Teen-Taal⁶, one has to break up the words completely, thus destroying the soul of the Kayda. Here, tabla player does not know which letter gets the stress⁷ and one does not read or play it this way. Other than its simplification of putting one matra by assigning a long curve at the bottom, it does not serve any other purpose. In fact, it confuses the player

¹ Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860-1936), renowned Indian Musicologist.

² Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931), renowned Indian Classical Vocalist and Musicologist.

³ Kayda literally means rules. A composition guided by set of rules is Kayda. Delhi Kayda means a composition based on set of rules from Delhi Gharana (traditional system of transferring knowledge from one generation to next).

⁴ Here we are using Hindi letters with English letters. Please note that each Hindi letter will start with Capital English Letter. Thus in this composition, the first word DhaTiTt has three Hindi letters as Dha, Ti and Tt. For all Tabla Hindi letters and its English equivalent, please refer to Appendix 1.

⁵ Matra is what Note is in Western Classical Music. Matra is one beat of a Taal. For example, Teen Taal consists of 16 Matras or beats of 4 equal sections.

⁶ Taal is a cycle of beats with sub-sections. Teen-Taal consists of 16 matras or 16 beats in equal time interval. Teen Taal has 4 sub-sections called as Vibhag (Hindi word) of 4 matras each. One complete cycle is called Avartana (Hindi word). Indian Taal moves in cyclical way meaning, after 16 matras it will start again with first matra.

⁷ The word intent to mean where player should give force on his fingers, wrist so as to make a point while playing tabla.

completely. We do know Jati⁸ or Laya⁹ of the composition. If we write the same Kayda in Pt. Paluskar Notation system, it will be written as

DhaTiTt

DhaTiTt

DhaDhaTiTt

DhaGaTiNaKiNa

Here one does not know where the Matra starts and ends. In both the systems, no one knows how the strokes are played on Tabla. These systems are predominantly time measure systems. Most of the books on Tabla mentions about the need for the improved table notation system. Western music notation system has progressed for the past few centuries. One can play an instrument once he learns the notation. Due to this the western music, especially western classical music progressed faster and worldwide. The traditional Indian education system is of Guru¹⁰ Shishya¹¹ Parampara¹² (Master-Student Tradition). This consisted of Guru transferring his knowledge vocally to Shishya. There was hardly any writing of compositions and Shishya was to remember it throughout his life to further transfer the knowledge he learned from his Guru. This is also known as Gharana system. Due to this reason, many best compositions were lost and it put restrictions on the music's unrestricted progress. In the western musical system, one has to play the composition exactly as written and the artist is not allowed to any variation while presenting. The Indian music did not restrict this part on the artist and he was allowed to do any number of variations

⁸ Jati is one of the character of the composition. It depends on how many laghus (Hindi word meaning number of sub-parts) are present in one Matra. In this composition, there are four matras and each matra has four laghus. Thus, the first matra has Dha, Ti, Tt and Dha as four laghus. Since four laghus in one matra called as Chatastra (Sanskrit word for four) Jaati. Likewise there are Tistra (3 Laghus), Khanda (5 Laghus), Mishra (7 Laghus), etc.

⁹ Laya (Sanskrit word meaning speed) is the equal time interval between two matras.

¹⁰ Guru (Sanskrit word) meaning Master or Teacher.

¹¹ Shishya (Sanskrit word) meaning disciple or student.

¹² Parampara (Sanskrit word) meaning tradition.

within boundaries of that Raga¹³ per his skills in the presentation. This also restricted the need for written composition. Whatever the cause may be, but western classical system progressed faster than Indian classical music. Today's western classical musical notation system has probably reached its zenith.

Indian Tabla playing has progressed tremendously. There are many good books on Tabla giving the best compositions. However, one does not know how to play them correctly, as there is no scientific way of writing the notations. This is because we are still using Pt. Bhatkhande and Pt. Paluskar notation system, which was written mainly for Swar like Sa Re Ga Ma and not for Tabla's Dha Dhin Dhin Dha. In reality, tabla's compositions are based on mathematics and mathematics is a complete science. As such, the tabla notation system should have been developed long time ago.

Many books have done critical analysis of Pt. Bhatkhande and Pt. Paluskar's notation system. Hence, we will not elaborate again on the same thing. However, almost all books have written about the improved tabla notation system showing how the particular "Bol" (letter) is played. Pandit Sudhir Mainkar¹⁴ in his book 'Tabla Vadan – Kala Aur Shastra'¹⁵ (Table playing – Art and Science) has written the objectives for Swar-Kal notation system (Time and How to play) as follows:

1. Keeping the original form of the composition.
2. Not to lose the composition due to memory loss.
3. Giving the knowledge in originality to the next generation.
4. The need to understand what we hear from reading the composition.

¹³ Raga (Sanskrit word) meaning the composition of certain notes or Swara (Sanskrit word).

¹⁴ Renound musicologist. Desciple of Ustad Inam Ali Khan of Delhi Gharana and Pandit Sudir Saxena of Ajarada Gharana. He is an authority on Tabla as a science and art. Please see www.tablabook.com

¹⁵ See Reference at the end for book details.

5. The ability in novice artist to play the composition without the aid of his/her Guru.

I added two more objectives to this list as

6. To clear the difference in playing and saying (Padhant¹⁶), like we say DhiKiTt but it is played as Dhi Ti Tt.
7. Those who do not know Devnagari Script should also be able to understand the notation system and play the composition.

I felt the need for improvised tabla notation system from the very day I started learning tabla. As I progressed further, it became apparent that not only me, but also everyone is looking forward for a new notation system that will at least take away the deficiencies of Pt. Bhatkhande and Pt. Paluskar system. Keeping the above-mentioned objectives and the strong desire that tabla should become popular throughout the world, I have developed this new Kal-Akshar Notation system.

While developing the Kal-Akshar Notation system, I studied the currently used Pt. Bhatkhande and Pt. Paluskar system in detail. Most of the books have already done enough discussion about the pros and cons of these systems. In his book *Tabla Vadan – Kala aur Shatra*, Pandit Sudhir Mainkar has done very scientific and logical discussion about how the Kal-Swar notation system should be. He has also taken a review of some proposed development in this regard and suggested some possible systems. He has rightly stressed the issue of the need for the further research in this regard.

¹⁶ Padhant (Hindi word) meaning saying the letters vocally in rhythmic fashion by having proper stress on the word keeping the laya and matra in a given Taal.

Pandit Arvind Mulgaonkar¹⁷ in his book “Tabla”¹⁸, has given some notation regarding Tali¹⁹, Khali²⁰ portion of the composition. He has also given symbols for the heavy, medium strokes, Meend (base swar from Bayan), and suggested its use. Mr. Rajendra Paropkari of Aurangabad suggested me to read Robert Gottlieb’s, “Solo Tabla Drumming of North India”²¹. In this book, Mr. Robert Gottlieb has used the western classical notation system for Tabla. He used symbol for Dha and Ti; then also wrote the composition in English and used the western classical time scale symbols for it. Pandit Yogesh Samsi²² suggested me to read articles by Mr. James Kippen²³. On Mr. Kippen’s website (now it is down) he has given symbols for some letters and tried to make use of western system. I was lucky to study these articles before he took down his website. I had many discussions with my Guru Mr. Abhay Samant²⁴ on this issue and that inspired me to do further research in this field.

I did lot of research by reading various books on Tabla, getting various articles from internet etc. By reading lot of blogs, it became very clear that there is tremendous need for the new system. I thought of using western classical notation system in this regard like others learned artist mentioned above. I studied the western notation system and came to conclusion that there are some

¹⁷ Renound Tabla player, musicologist and prominent disciple of Ustad Amir Husain Khan, Khalifa of Farukhabad Gharana. He is an authority on Tabla as science and art.

¹⁸ See References at the end for book details.

¹⁹ Tali (Hind word) menaing clap. As Taal is subdivided into parts, each part begins with clap (Tali) or no-clap (showing hands in the opposite direction of clapping) called as Khali (Hindi word meaning empty).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See Reference at the end for book details.

²² Leading Tabla player and disciple of Ustad Allar Khan of Punjab Gharana.

²³ University of Toronto Professor. He studied Tabla and wrote many articles.

²⁴ Based out of Aurangabad. Grandson of Pandit G.L. Samant and son of Pandit Ramesh Samant, both renound Tabla players.

fundamental differences is western and Indian classical music. Western classical music goes in countless beats whereas Indian system has concept of Taal and Khali-Bhari system. Regardless, by using the concept of western classical notations, currently used Pt. Bhatkhande and Pt. Paluskar system, concepts given in Pandit Mainkar's book, other books, articles and my limited thinking, I have developed the Kal-Akshar Notation system for Tabla, which satisfies all the objectives, listed earlier. Now let us get into the knits and bits of the system.

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