

Tabla Kal-Akshar Notation System

Part 2: Akshar Notations

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Having defined the Taal, various parts of Taal, Jaatis and its associated speed, now we will focus on various symbols representing various Tabla Bols or Akshar (letters). The strokes, which are played on Tabla, are called as Bol. Basically there are three types of Bol (Varna) as

1. Bols only on Bayan (Dagga)
2. Bols only on Dayan (Tabla)
3. Bols played on Bayan and Dayan together

How to play these Varna's or bols is described in detail in various books. As it is not the main topic of this article, we will not discuss it here. In the new Kal-Akshar Notation System, we will use special symbols along with letters. Our aim is to give a particular symbol for each tabla letter or Akshara. There is a discrepancy in tabla letter saying and playing like word DhiKiTt is played as DhiTiTt and the letter Tt is played differently in TiRaKiTt and TiTt. These symbols are closely associated with how that particular letter is played on the tabla barring few exceptions.

We have used circle symbol representing Syahi¹ (ink portion) of the Tabla. All bols played only on Bayan will be a combination of circle and a line. For bols played only on Dayan, we will use a combination of circle and dots. The combined bols of Bayan and Dayan will be a solid circle with lines as well as dot combination. Now let us study the figure showing various Bol Symbols.

¹ Syahi (Hindi Word) meaning ink. The centre portion of Tabla and Dagga have black circular portion consisting of black ink, iron particles and special glue. It is applied in layers.

Bol (Letter) Symbols

Bayan			Dayan			Combined		
Letter	Hindi	Symbol	Letter	Hindi	Symbol	Letter	Hindi	Symbol
Ga , Ge, Gi	ग, गे, गि	ॐ	Ti, Ta, Tu, Ti	ति, त, तु, ट	○	Dha	धा	●
Gha, Ghe, Ghi	घ, घे, घि	ॐ	Ra, Na, Ta	र, न, ट	⊙	Dhin	धिं	●
Ka, Kaa, Ki	क, का, कि	○	Na, Nam	न, नं	○	Dhi	धि	●
Kat	कत्	○	Naa, Taa, Daa	ना, ता, डा	○	Tin	तिं	●
Ga (Khula)	ग (खुला)	○	Na, Da	न, इ	○	Ghad	घड	●
Empty Space	अवग्रह	S	(Ring Finger)	(अनामिका)	○	Kda	कड	●
			Tra	त्र	⊙	Ghdan	घडान्	●
			Ka	क	⊙	Kdan	कडान्	●
			Di	दि	○	Dhet	धेत्	●
			Din	दिं	○	Dhir	धिर	●
			Tet	तेत्	○			
			Tir	तिर	∞			
			Tak	तक्	○			

Bayan Symbols

1. V over circle (syahi) represents two fingers coming towards syahi.
2. Vertical line inside syahi (circle) represents ghumara (resonant sound). It shows the bottom side of palm going upwards from Maidaan (portion between syahi and kinar) to syahi.
3. Horizontal line represents 'Thap' i.e. all four fingers strike together just above syahi. After striking all the fingers are lifted up giving echoing sound. In Ka, Kaa and Ki, the top portion of all combined fingers is stroked above syahi whereas in Khula (open) Ga, it is played below syahi.
4. Curve line above syahi represents "Thap' kept on syahi while playing Kat.

Dayan Symbols

1. Dot represents relative position of finger on syahi.
2. The most commonly used Ti, Ta, Tu and Tt are represented by hollow circle. There are various ways of striking finger for these letters depending on Gharana. For details one can see a nice video clip on Chandrakanta.com
3. The difference between Di and Din is shown by having extra dot in 'Din'. The bol Din is an open bol. After striking three fingers just above syahi, they are immediately lifted up giving ringing sound. The bol 'Di' is normally used as one of the middle bol in a bol samuha (group). For example GaDiGaNa.
4. The bol 'Ka' that comes only after Tra in TraKa, is shown how exactly is stroked on the syahi as Tra by two fingers and Ka by three fingers.
5. The bol "Tir" having two adjacent circles should not be confused with Ti and Ra. This bol is part of TirTir. Since Ti and Ra are played separately, we have used two circles and since Ti and Ra cannot be separated, we have joined the circles.

Combined Bol Symbols

1. They are represented by a solid circle and combination of line and dots.
2. The difference between 'Dhi' and 'Dhin' is shown by different location of the dot. Though they are played at the same spot (shown in Dhi), we keep the striking index finger to suppress the sound, where as we lift the finger immediately in Dhin go give ringing sound.
3. The bol Dhir is a part of bol samuha DhirDhir and it is not separate Dhi and Ra.
4. Other symbols are self explanatory








Rest Symbol

1. We have used standard S shape for rest symbol.
2. In western notation system, there are different symbols for various rest time like semiquaver, quaver, etc. However, here we will use only one rest symbol and repeat the symbol for each laghu having rest position






Now we will use the same symbols for Boljati and Laya as explained in Part I.

These symbols are combined with Bol Symbols as follows.

Jaati Symbols







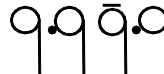

Bol	Symbol	Description
Tisra		Slanted line towards left drawn below letter
Chatasra		Vertical line drawn below letter
Khanda		Slanted line towards right drawn below letter
Mishra		Curved line towards left drawn below letter
Sankirna		Curved line towards right drawn below letter
Ekadash		Two curved lines towards left drawn below letter
Trayodash		Two curved lines towards right drawn below letter

Laya Symbols

Laya	Symbol	Description
Half		Horizontal zigzag line between BolJaati lines
Normal		One horizontal straight line between BolJaati lines
Double		Two horizontal straight lines between BolJaati lines
Triple		Three horizontal straight lines between BolJaati lines
Quadriple		Four horizontal straight lines between BolJaati lines

Like previous part, we will combine Bol symbols along with Jati and Laya symbols to notate tabla letters.

Bol, Jaati and Laya Together

Laghu	1 Laghu	2 Laghus	3 Laghus	4 Laghus	5 Laghus
Jaati	Full Matra	Chatasra	Tisra	Chatasra	Khanda
Laya		Half	Normal	Normal	Normal
Step 1 Bol	Dha ●	Dha Ti ● ○	Dha Ge Na ● ॐ ○	Ti Na Ki Na ○ ○ ̄ ○	Dha Ti Dha Ge Na ● ○ ● ॐ ○
Step 2 Jaati	No Symbol	Dha Ti 	Dha Ge Na 	Ti Na Ki Na 	Dha Ti Dha Ge Na 
Step 3 Laya	No Symbol	Dha Ti 	Dha Ge Na 	Ti Na Ki Na 	Dha Ti Dha Ge Na 

Laghu	6 Laghus	7 Laghus
Jaati	Tisra	Mishra
Laya	Double	Normal
Step 1 Bol	Dha Ge Na DhaTra Ka ● ॐ ○ ● ⊕ ⊕	DhaGe Na Ti Na Ki Na ● ॐ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Step 2 Jaati	Dha Ge Na DhaTra Ka ● ॐ ○ ○ ● ⊕ ⊕	DhaGe Na Ti Na Ki Na ● ॐ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Step 3 Laya	DhaGe Na DhaTra Ka ● ॐ ○ ○ ● ⊕ ⊕	DhaGe Na Ti Na Ki Na ● ॐ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Laghu	9 Laghus	9 Laghus
Jaati	Tisra	Sankirna
Laya	Triple	Normal
Step 1 Bol	Dha Tr Ka Dhi Ki Ta DhaGe Na ● ⊕ ⊕ ● ○ ⊕ ● ॐ ○	Dha Ti DhaGe Na Ti Na Ki Na ● ○ ● ॐ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Step 2 Jaati	Dha Tr Ka Dhi Ki Ta DhaGe Na ● ⊕ ⊕ ● ○ ⊕ ● ॐ ○	Dha Ti DhaGe Na Ti Na Ki Na ● ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ
Step 3 Laya	Dha Tr Ka Dhi Ki Ta DhaGe Na ● ⊕ ⊕ ● ○ ⊕ ● ॐ ○	Dha Ti DhaGe Na Ti Na Ki Na ● ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ

In addition, we can see how two different laya can be written. For explanation, please see part I.

Many Laghus in One Matra

Laghu	4 Laghu
Jaati	Chatasra
Laya	Mixed
Step 1 Bol	Dha ऽ Ti Ra Ki Tt ● ऽ ○ ⊙ ○ ○
Step 2 Jaati	Dha ऽ Ti Ra Ki Tt ● ○ ⊙ ○ ○
Step 3 Laya	Dha ऽ Ti Ra Ki Tt ● ○ ⊙ ○ ○

Now let us take the same example of Tripalli and Delhi Kayada to notate.

TeenTaal 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Delhi Kayda Band Baaz
 16 Matra x 2 + 3

Base CH

Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha Ti Tt DhaGe Ti Naa Ki Naa

x

Ta Ti Tt Ta Ti Tt Ta Ta Ti Tt DhaGe DhiNaa Gi Naa

2

Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha Ti Tt DhaGe Ti Naa Ki Naa

+

Ta Ti Tt Ta Ti Tt Ta Ta Ti Tt DhaGe DhiNaa Gi Naa

3

Palta 1

Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha

x

Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha Ti Tt DhaGe Ti Naa Ki Naa

2

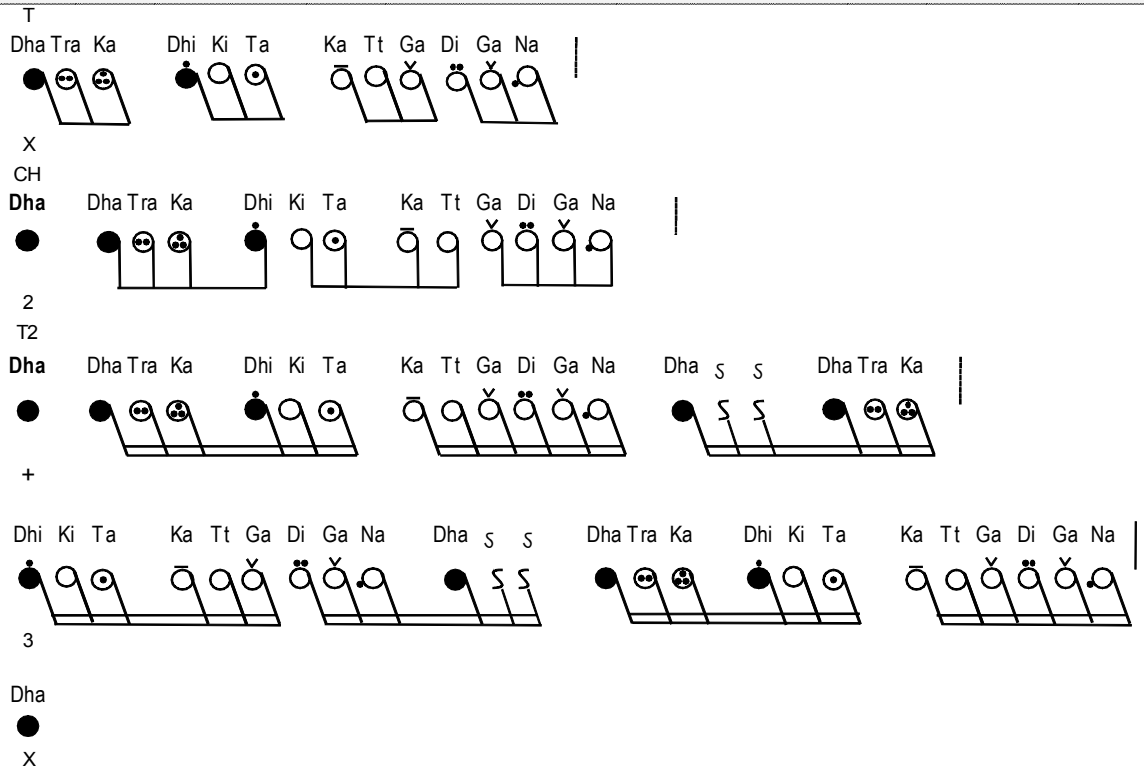
Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha

+

Dha Ti Tt Dha Ti Tt DhaDha Ti Tt DhaGe Ti Naa Ki Naa

3

TeenTaal	4 4 4 4	Tripalli	Band Baaz
16 Matra	x 2 + 3		



In the above Tripalli, we have shown Taal and its distribution. The 1st Bol Dha has T on the top shows Tisra Jaati in normal speed. C on top of 5th Matra shows the end of Tisra Jaati and beginning of Chatasra Jaati and lastly, T2 above 9th matra shows end of Chatasra Jaati and beginning of Tisra Jaati in double speed until the end.

Thus, the tabla player has exact knowledge of the laya (speed) for each matra and within matra for the Varna or Bol. The symbol for Bols not only shows its position but the difference between actual stroke and its pronunciation. For example, in Bolsamuha or word DhiKiTta, the bol Ki is played as Ti and the actual strokes will DhiTiTta. Thus, we will write DhiKitta but the symbol for Bols will show DhiTiTta. This is very advantageous for beginners. In addition, in the

word TraKa the Ka is played on Tabla (and not Bayan), which is shown symbolically.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Kaal-Akshar Notation System

As we know and acknowledge that Pandit Bhatkhande and Pandit Paluskar notation system for Tabla are incomplete. We have eliminated all the lacunas of those two system as well added so many features that this is an independent notation system by itself and that too complete in all respect. Let us see its advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages.

1. Taal and its distribution are given in the beginning.
2. Name of composition (bandish), its gharana, Khula or Band Baaj is given.
3. Composition's Jaati is right on first matra and at locations where it changes Jaati or Laya (speed). A very important feature
4. Taali and Khaali, etc. Taal characteristics are shown.
5. It shows where Matra starts and ends
6. One does not need to count laghus to determine its Jaati or speed as it is graphically shown.
7. Various laya within a matra can also be shown.
8. No breaking of Bol Samuha, thus one will play it by phrase (the way it should be).
9. Easy to do Padhant (remembering).
10. Clear separation of Padhant and how the stroke is actually played on Tabla, like DhiKiTta, TiRaKiTta, etc.
11. Those who do not understand Devnagri script and read it.
12. It will keep the originality of the bandish (composition).

Disadvantages

1. It takes time to accept and get used to, to the new system. This time depends on one's understanding of the subject and his knowledge. This time can vary individually. Some may find it little complicated. It should be noted that we have not used even 1/10th of the number of symbols present in the western musical notation system (which is very popular).
2. Some may find that it takes too long to write. Since we have added how the strokes are played, it will take time in the beginning.

References

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Part III

We can also write how the KuAad, BiAaad speeds can be written. All these can be shown in this notation system and this will be posted later.

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Hindi Words used in the Article

Avagraha	Rest position
Avartana	One complete cycle of a Taal. For example when all 10 matras are played in ZapTaal, it is said to have completed one Avartana or cycle.
Baaj	The way of playing Tabla
Band Baaj	Specifically Delhi Gharana style, having sharp and close strokes on tabla
Bandish	Composition
Barabar Laya	Same as Thhaya Laya or the base laya.
Bee-Aaad	One and Three-Fourth speed than Thhaya laya
Bol	Letter that is played on Tabla
Chatasra Jaati	Four laghus in one Matra
Chougun	Quadruple speed than Thhaya laya
Dedi (Dedhi)	One and Half speed than Thhaya laya
Dugoon	Double speed than Thhaya laya
Ekadash	Eleven laghus in one Matra
Jaati	Caste of the Composition
Kayada	The basic concept of Tabla playing
Khaali	No Clap: This is shown by having palm of the hand shown in reverse direction of clap.
Khanda Jaati	Five laghus in one Matra
Khula Baaj	Banaras Gharana style, having open and bass mixed strokes.
Ku-Aaad	One and Quarter speed than Thhaya laya

Laghu	Sub-part of Matra like half note (minim). In this system, we can have from 1 to 16 laghus or sub parts of a Matra or full note.
Laya	Speed. It is the constant time between two matras. Laya is normally Vilambeet (Slow), Madhya (Medium) or Drut (Fast). From the base laya (which is usually vilambeet or Madhya-vilambeet), one has to determine its base speed, which is called as Thhaya Laya or Barabar.
Matra	Full Note in a time scale
Meend	Stokes on Bayan having bass mixed sound
Mishra Jaati	Seven laghus in one Matra
Sam	The first matra of the Taal.
Taal	Rhythmic pattern of notes and beats having definite structure
Taali	Dictionary Meaning: Clap. Though we usually clap at Taali, one has to understand the concept behind it. Each Taala has a definite structure. Taal is divided into Vibhag (Sub-parts). Each Vibhag either begins with Taali (clap) or Khaali (no clap) depending on the Varna or Bol or Letter associated with that note.
Thhaya Laya	The base laya.
Tigun	Triple speed than Thhaya laya
Tisra Jaati	Three laghus in one Matra
Trayodash	Thirteen laghus in one Matra
Tripalli	Composition having three different speeds
Varna	Same as Bol
Vibhag	Sub-part of a Taal. For example, Teen Taal (total 16 matra) has 4 Vibhag of 4 Matra each; Zap Taal (total 10 matra) has 4 Vibhag of 2, 3, 2 and 3 Matra each.