Chapter 6

The North Indian rhythmic system

6.1 Elementary rhythmic concepts

The rhythm is fundamental to the creation of any musical system. From a historic standpoint, rhythm structures existed in India many centuries before the word *rāga* was ever used. Given this historical preeminence, it is not surprising that rhythm occupies an important position in the Indian system of music.

There are similarities between Western and Indian rhythm. Western rhythm may function at the level of beats, measures or even longer cycles. The same is true of Indian rhythm. They can be looked at more closely at these different levels.

The Indian science of rhythm is known as *tāl*. Today, percussion instruments have replaced the clap in the performance, but the term still reflects its origin. The basic concepts of *tāl* are: *tālī*, or *bhārī*, *khālī*, *vibhāg*, or *ang*, *mātrā*, *bol*, *ṭheka*, *laya*, *sam* and *avartan*. These concepts are discussed in the following sections.

6.1.1 *Tāl*

The word *tāl* literally means "clap". The clapping of hands may be is the oldest form of rhythmic accompaniment. Today, a system of claps, *tālī*, and waves, *khālī*, forms a conceptual common ground. It is common to the way Indian instrumentalists, dancers and vocalists think of rhythm.

The clap of the hands is an important part of both the science and practice of North

Indian music. It has a hoary past. An elaborate system of clapping and hand movements is mentioned in the ancient text *Nāṭya Śāstra* (see section 1.1) where it is part of the system of timekeeping known as *kriyā*. The clap of the hands is very important for the conceptualization of Indian rhythms. North Indian musicians use the claps to designate the measures (*vibhāg*) which are highly stressed. The most stressed measure is the beginning of the cycle (*sam*), the most important beat in the whole cycle. The clapping of hands is also of great practical importance in performances. It is a convenient means for the singers and other musicians to communicate with the drum player without having to break the performance. The clapping must not be taken only into itself because it exits along with its counterpart, the wave. This wave or *khālī* is also important in designating the measures (see below).

6.1.2 *Mātrā*

The most fundamental unit of Indian rhythmic theory is the *mātrā*. This translates to "beat". In many cases the *mātrā* is just a single stroke. However, just as sixteenth, or eighth–notes may be strung together to make a single beat, so too may several strokes of the drum be strung together to have the value of one *mātrā*.

6.1.3 *Vibhāg*

A higher level of structure with respect to the *mātrā* is the *vibhāg*. This translates to "measure" or "bar". A measure may be as little as one beat or more than five; usually a *vibhāg* is two, three, or four *mātrā*s (beats) in length.

The *vibhāg*s are described in terms of claps and waves. A *vibhāg*, which is signified by a clap of the hands, is said to be *bhārī* or *tālī*. Conversely, a *vibhāg* which is signified by a waving of the hand, is said to be *khālī*.

For example a common indian *tāl* called *Tintāl*, taken now as an illustration of these concepts, has 16 beats divided into four *vibhāg*s (measures – marked by claps or waves) of four *mātrā*s (beats – indicated by number, claps or waves) each. Indian musicians say that this *tāl* is a "cycle divided into 4+4+4+4". Its clapping arrangement is shown in table 6.1.

mātrās	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
tāl	**Clap**	2	3	4	**Clap**	2	3	4	**Wave**	2	3	4	**Clap**	2	3	4
avartan	This is one *avartan*															

Table 6.1: The pattern of claps and waves defining *Tintāl*

This brings to the concept of the overall cycle. This Indian cycle, called *avartan*, represents the highest level of looking at the rhythm.

6.1.4 *Avartan*

The *avartan*, cycle, is in some ways comparable to the Western cycle (e.g. a 16 bar blues pattern) with but a few differences. One of the biggest differences is that in Western music the *measure* is considered inviolate, while in North Indian music the *cycle* is considered inviolate. That is to say that a Western musician would think nothing of establishing a 16 bar pattern, break the pattern for some artistic reason and then reestablish it; however the measures would all be the same. Conversely, Indian musicians typically will mix the measures. For instance a common *tāl* known as *Jhaptāl* is four measures of (i) two–beats, (ii) three–beats, (iii) two-beats, (iv) three-beats respectively (i.e. a cycle divided as 2+3+2+3), however the overall 10 beat pattern, shown in table 6.2, may not be altered.

mātrās	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
tāl	**Clap**	2	**Clap**	2	3	**Wave**	2	**Clap**	2	3
avartan	This is one *avartan*									

Table 6.2: The pattern of claps and waves defining *Jhaptāl*

*Avartan*s may be of any number of *mātrās*. The most common numbers are 16, 14, 12, 10, 8, 7, and 6. Most of the music played in Northern India today is in one of these numbers. Although the cycle is found in Western music there is a flexibility that is not allowed in Indian music. If one is playing a 16 beat structure, one must maintain that structure throughout.

6.1.5 *Sam*

The importance of the cycle gives special significance to the first beat. This beat, called *sam* (pronounced like "sum"), is a point of convergence between the drum player and the other musicians. In Sanskrit the word *sam* means "with", "together", or "common".

One of the main functions of the *sam* is to establish a point of resolution. Although improvisations and fixed compositions may begin almost anywhere in the cycle (*avartan*) they almost always resolve on the *sam*. Whenever a cadence is indicated it will usually end on this *sam*. This means that the *sam* may be thought of as both the beginning of some structures as well as the ending of others.

The *sam* is also a pivotal point. For example in a north Indian classical music recital, usually accompanyied by *tabla*, during the performance the *tabla* player keeps time by playing a conventional pattern of drum strokes (*ṭheka*) and the main musician is free to improvise. Sometimes it is common to trade places. During this, the main musician keeps time by playing a melodic theme (*gat* or *sthai*) over and over. This allows the *tabla* player to take off and improvise. After a period the roles reverse again. The *sam* is important because it is pivotal to this transition.

The *sam* is so important that it has its own notational symbol. In the Bhatkhande system of notation it is noted with cross such as an "x" or an "+". The *sam* is in almost all the *tāl*s a clap of the hands.[1]

6.1.6 *Khālī*

The word *khālī* literally means "empty". However in the field of north Indian music it has a special significance. Here the word implies a wave of the hand. This wave of the hand, along with its counterpart, the clap of the hand, *tālī*, forms as said the basis for timekeeping in north India.

The wave of the hand is used to designate the first *mātrā*of those measures (*vibhāg*s) which are only moderately stresses. Therefore one almost never finds the *khālī* applied to

[1]There is only one exception and that is the case of the *tāl* known as *Rupaktāl*. This lone exception designates the beginning of the cycle with a wave of the hands (*khālī*). See section 6.2.1 for more details.

strongly stressed beats like the *sam*.

The *khālī* is especially important in symmetrical metres such as *Tintāl* of 16 beats, or *Dādrā tāl* of 6 beats, or *Kaherava tāl* of 8 beats. For such symmetrical *tāl*s the *khālī* is indispensable for correct orientation. For example, if there were no *khālī*, *Tintāl* would be a confusing string of four beat measures and it would be very difficult to find the beginning of the cycle. Therefore the *khālī* may be thought of as an index.

The *khālī*, along with the *tālī*, form a convenient method by which vocalists may communicate with the drum player without halting the performance. This allows communication between the artists to continue during the performance without a break in the musical flow.

6.1.7 The *bols* as a system of mnemonics

The mnemonic syllable, called *bol*, is a very important concept in the Indian rhythmic thought. The word *bol* is derived from the word "Bolna" which means "to speak". It is a series of syllables which correlate to the various strokes of the *pakhāwaj* or *tabla* and are used to define the *tāl*.

Mnemonic syllables are used in *pakhāwaj*, *mridangam*, and *tabla*. These drums are said to reproduce inner divine sounds that can be heard in meditation. So the *bol*s can be viewd like *mātrā*s.

There is a difference in the way that north Indians and south Indians use these syllables. In the north the *tāl* is actually defined by the *bol*s while in the south they are merely a mnemonic aid to the musician.

There are numerous example of how north Indian musicians use the bol to define the *tāl*. The case of *Tintāl* is a good example. It has the *bol*s *Dhā*, *Dhin*, *Nā*, *Tin*,[2] arranged as in table 6.3 below, where *vibhāg*s are marked by "**x**", "**0**", or numbers.

There are other *tāl*s which have the same patterns of claps (*tālī*) and waves *khālī*) as *Tintāl*, but they are considered separate *tāl*s because the *bol*s are different.

Another *tāl* that shows a symmetry similar to *Tintāl* is the *Kaherava tāl* used in most of the Siddha Yoga fast chants. It has the *bol*s *Dhā*, *Dhin*, *Nā*, *Tin*, *Ge*, *Ka* arranged as in

[2]See chapter 4 for an introduction to the drum *bol*s and their technique.

x				**2**			
Dhā	*Dhin*	*Dhin*	*Dhā*	*Dhā*	*Dhin*	*Dhin*	*Dhā*
0				**4**			
Dhā	*Tin*	*Tin*	*Nā*	*Nā*	*Dhin*	*Dhin*	*Dhā*

Table 6.3: The *Tintāl Ṭheka*

table 6.4. The *khālī* breaks the cycle in two equal parts.

Those of tables 6.3 and 6.4 are examples of *ṭheka* which is a conventional arrangement of *bol*s defining the *tāl* and subject to variations during the accompanyiment of a piece (see more in section 6.2.1).

x				**0**			
Dhā	*Ge*	*Nā*	*Tin*	*Nā*	*Ka*	*Dhin*	*Nā*

Table 6.4: The *Kaherava Ṭheka*

The situation is somewhat different in the south. South Indian *tāl* are defined by the clapping and waving and the syllables are merely technical mnemonics. In *Carnatic* music it is *not* normal to have different *tāl*s sharing the same clapping / waving patterns.

It is very common for people to actually equate the *bol*s with the strokes themselves, however there are differences amongs the different (*Hindustani*) percussion instruments. For instance there are differences between the *bol*s of the *pakhāwaj* and those of the *tabla*. One may even find subtle differences between one school of *tabla* or *pakhāwaj* (*gharana*) and another. The end result is that the *bol* should be seen as a mere description of the technique rather than an iron clad prescription.

However the word *bol* is so attached to the strokes that it has come to mean both the verbal recitation as well as the performance of the strokes. *Bol*s are indeed important because they allow the drummers to remember compositions, such as *ṭheka*s or their variations. Musicians also use the *bol*s to perform the mental permutations to know if an improvised

passage or "lick" will work.

6.1.8 *Lay*

Lay is the tempo, or speed of a piece. The Hindi term for tempo is *lay* and is derived from the Sanskrit term *laya*. It is a very simple concept, but its application is sometimes complicated. It goes without saying that there have to be some practical limit to usable tempi. One beat every ten minutes would be so slow as to be musically useless. At the other end of the spectrum, 100 beats per second would be so fast that it would be perceived as a tone and not as a rhythm. A general breakdown of Indian *lay* is shown in the following table 6.5.

Lay – tempo		
Name	beats/min	English
ati–ati–drut	640	very very fast
ati–drut	320	very fast
drut	160	fast
madhya	80	medium
vilambit	40	slow
ati–vilambit	20	very slow
ati–ati–vilambit	10	very very slow

Table 6.5: The Indian speeds of a musical piece

Table 6.5 is an idealized breakdown of *lay*. In practice there can be different interpretations of speeds. For instance, vocalists use a slower definition of time than instrumentalists.

The *lay* or tempo usually changes throughout the performance. These changes in tempo are inextricably linked to the various musical styles. In general we can say that only very short pieces will maintain a fairly steady pace. Most styles will start at one tempo and then increase in speed.

6.2 Cyclic and cadential *bol* patterns

Although there are many compositional forms, or patterns of *bol*s, there are really only two overall classes: cyclic and cadential. These mutually exclusive classes are based upon simple philosophies.

The cadential class has a feeling of imbalance; it moves forward to an inevitable point of resolution, usually on the *sam*. *Mridang* turnarounds and *tihai* s are examples of such forms. It is a classic case of tension/resolve.

In contrast, the cyclic class comprises material which rolls along without any strong sense of direction. One may generally ascribe a feeling of balance and repose to this class. These include our basic accompanying patterns, such as *ṭheka* and *prakar* (ways to play a *ṭheka*).

The alternation between the cyclic and the cadential material is like a dynamo which drives a performance of Indian music forward. This happens in a Siddha Yoga chant as well. The cyclic material is the groove or rhythmic foundation upon which the other musicians rely. The stability of the cyclic form makes it suitable for providing the musical framework for drum accompaniment. Conversely the tension and instability of the cadenza provides the energy to keep the performance or the chant moving.

6.2.1 *Ṭheka*

Ṭheka is the accompaniment pattern used for Indian music and is the most basic cyclic form. The word *ṭheka* literally means "support" or "a place of rest". Whenever a drummer is accompanying a vocalist, dancer, instrumentalist, or a chant, with *tabla* or *mridang* he will spend most of the time playing this. *Ṭheka* is defined entirely by its function. It is the major accompaniment pattern for north Indian music. Any structure imaginable may be found, but a binary structure, i.e. *bhārī–khālī*, is quite common. *Ṭheka* has become inextricably linked to the fundamental concepts of *tal*. In northern India, when one speaks of *Tintāl*, *Rupaktāl*, or any other *tāl*, one is generally speaking of the *ṭheka*. It is common for several north Indian *tāl*s to have the same number of beats, same arrangement of the *vibhags*, and

the same timekeeping (i.e., clap/wave patterns), yet be distinguished by their *ṭheka*s. This is unthinkable in south Indian music.

Fig. 6.1 below shows the common *Tintāl ṭheka*.

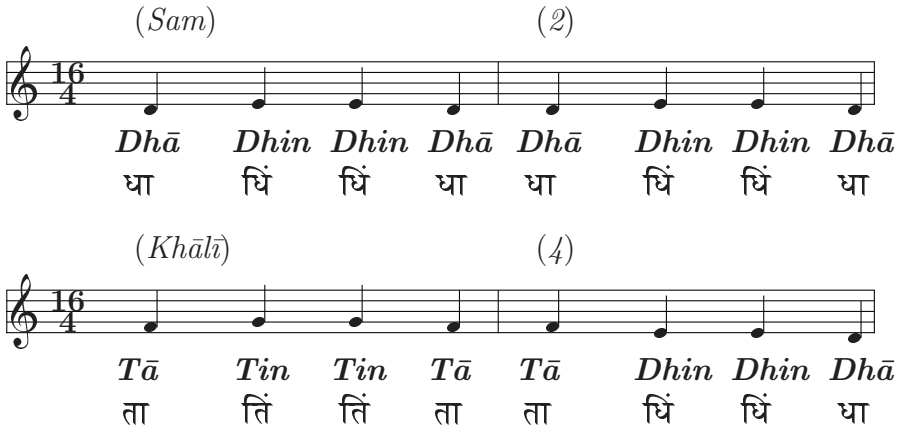


Figure 6.1: *Tintāl Ṭheka*

In the single fig. 6.1 various concepts of Indian rhythmic theory are illustrates. The more usual notation is shown in Sanskrit (Devnagri script) while Western elements have been added for the benefit of the non-Indian reader. The common *tāl* known as *Tintāl* is composed of four *vibhāg*s, of four *mātrā*s each, for a total of 16 *mātrā*s (see also tables 6.1 and 6.3). The individual strokes are specified with the *bol* (i.e., *Dhā*, *Dhin*, etc.) and their time value with the usual Western musical notation. As usual the beginning of each measure is designated by a symbol (i.e., cross, number or zero). These indicate the clapping arrangement (*tālī*) within the *tāl*. The wave of the hand (*khālī*) at beat 9 is designated with a "0" while the claps are designated with a number. The clap at *sam*, first beat of the cycle, is not designated with "1" but with a cross. A number designates then a second clap and third clap.

The topic of the *ṭheka* and its *bol*s is made interesting by the differences between *pakhāwaj* and *tabla*. The former is an ancient instrument while the latter is much younger. Hence there are many *ṭheka*s used in *tabla* accompanyiment which that *tabla* has derived from the progenitor, *pakhāwaj*. It is very common to see traditional *pakhāwaj* phrases such as *DhāDhāDinTā*, or *TeṬeKāTaGaDiGeNe* in *tabla* compositions.

In general all the patterns which were composed for the *pakhāwaj* can be played on

tabla. The contrary is not true. Some bass modulated *tabla bol*s are extremely difficult to obtain with a *pakhāwaj*. These *bol*s and their combinations with other *tabla* treble (open and closed) *bol*s are called "pure *tabla bol*s" and are present in *ṭheka*s that can only be played with *tabla*. However, the *pakhāwaj* compositional forms entered the *tabla* tradition retaining their unmodulated character, thus maintaining their mood of somber majesty.

One very common *ṭheka* from the *pakhāwaj* is *Chautāl* given in table 6.6 below.

x				**2**				**3**		**4**	
Dhā	*Dhā*	*Din*	*Tā*	*KīṬa*	*Dhā*	*Dhin*	*Tā*	*Te Ṭe*	*KāTa*	*GaDi*	*GeNe*

Table 6.6: The *Chautāl Ṭheka*

A representation of *Chautāl* similar to that given for *Tintāl* in fig. 6.1 is given in fig. 6.2 below.

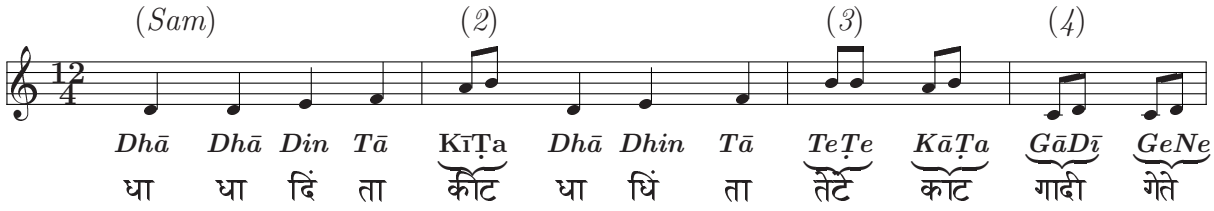


Figure 6.2: *Chautāl Ṭheka*

It is a 12 beat *tāl* divided in 4+4+2+2. It does not have *vibhāg*s beginning with a *khālī*. This is usual in *pakhāwaj* compositional forms where the system of clapping was different from the one adopted today. Today a *tāl* must have both claps and waves of the hands, while many *pakhāwaj* traditions did not use the concept of wave at all.

A *tabla tāl* of 12 beats and divided also in 4+4+2+2 like *Chautāl*, but having the *khālī* on beat 9 is the *tāl* known as *Ektāl*. It is given in table 6.7 below. A representation of *Ektāl* with elements of Western music notation is also given in fig. 6.3. There are cases, such as slow tempi, in which *Ektāl* is further divided is 2+2+2+2+2+2 (having two *khālī*s, on *mātrā*s 3 and 7), and cases, faster tempi, where *Ektāl* is considered a 6 beat *tāl* divided into 2+2+1+1.

x				2				0		4	
Dhin	*Dhin*	*DhāGe*	*TeReKeṬe*	*Tin*	*Nā*	*Kat*	*Tā*	*DhāGe*	*TeReKeṬe*	*Dhin*	*Nā*

Table 6.7: The *Ektāl Ṭheka*

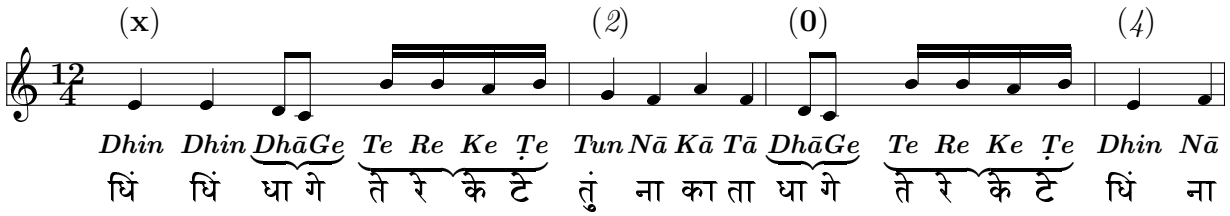


Figure 6.3: *Ektāl Ṭheka*

Tempo is another difference between the pure *tabla ṭheka*s and the *pakhāwaj* forms. *Tabla ṭheka*s may be performed as slow as 10 to 20 beats–per–minute or as fast as 700 beats–per–minute. In contrast the *pakhāwaj* material is in general performed in medium–slow, medium–fast tempo, generally between 50 and 180 beats–per–minute.

There is a tendency for *ṭheka* to be based upon two symmetrical structures. The *tāl* known as *Jhaptāl* is an example, see table 6.8. A representation of *Jhaptāl* with elements of Western music notation is given in fig. 6.4.

x		2			0		4		
Dhin	*Nā*	*Dhin*	*Dhin*	*Nā*	*Tin*	*Nā*	*Dhin*	*Dhin*	*Nā*

Table 6.8: The *Jhaptāl Ṭheka*

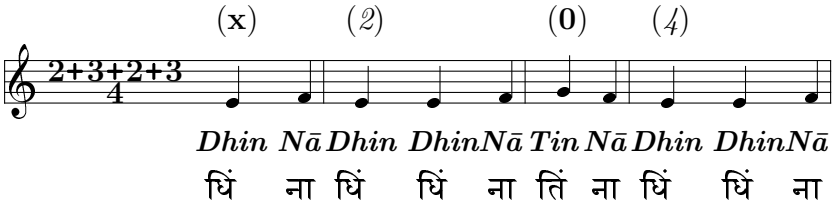


Figure 6.4: *Jhaptāl Ṭheka*

In *Jhaptāl* the 2+3 structure *DhinNā DhinDhinNā* is opposed by another 2+3 structure

TinNā DhinDhinNā.

This symmetry is also illustrated in *Dādrā tāl*, divided 3+3, see fig. 6.5.

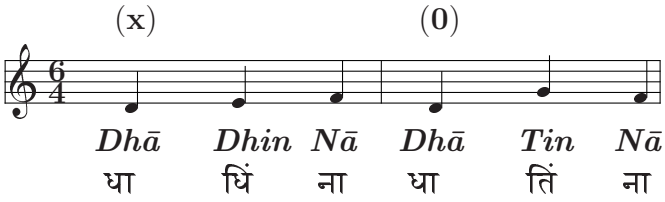


Figure 6.5: *Dādrā Ṭheka*

In this last example the phrase *DhāDhinNā* is reflected in the structure *DhāTinNā*. There are however numerous *ṭheka*s which do not exhibit this symmetrical quality. Therefore symmetry must be considered a tendency rather than a rule. As an example of asymmetrical division, a very common 7 beat *tāl* divided into 3+2+2 is known as *Rupaktāl*. His *ṭheka* is given in fig. 6.6.

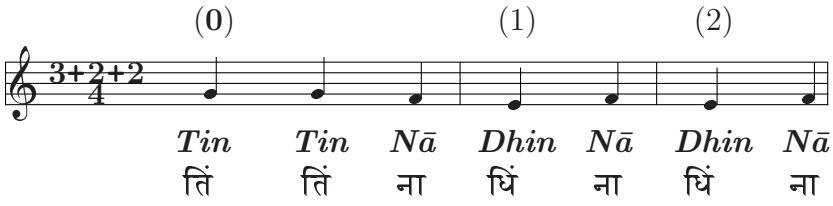


Figure 6.6: *Rupaktāl Ṭheka*

The *Rupaktāl* is interesting because it does present the *sam* on the first *mātrā* of the cycle. Instead of *sam* the first beat is in this case "stressed" by *khālī* (a wave instead of a clap). In this situation the remaining two *vibhāg*s are equally stressed by two claps giving to this *tāl* a peculiar pulse.

There is another observation that may be made about the structure of the *ṭheka* in general; there is a tendency for the *bol*s to follow the structure of the *vibhāg*. For instance, looking back at the *Jhaptāl* in the earlier example, in the division 2+3+2+3, the clapping arrangement of *Jhaptāl* is reflected in the *bol*s *DhinNā*+*DhinDhinNā*+*TinNā*+*DhinDhinNā*. However there are exceptions, like the *Ektāl* division and *vibhāg* / *bol* correlation, that show that this is merely a tendency rather than a rule.

Finally in fig. 6.7 is shown the *Kaherava ṭheka* of 8 beats, divided into 4+4. It represents the *tāl* in wich most of the Siddha Yoga fast chants are set.

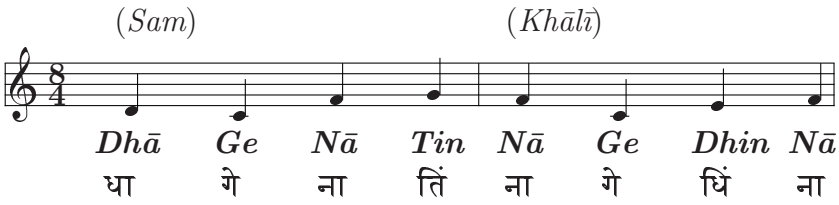


Figure 6.7: *Kaherava Ṭheka*

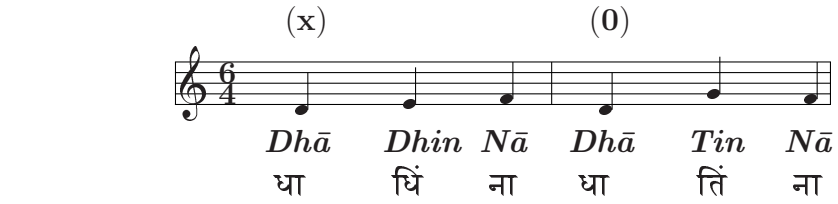
6.2.2 *Prakar*

The *prakar* is the variation or improvisation upon the *ṭheka*. When a indian drummer refers to "playing the *ṭheka*" he is actually referring to the *prakar*s. This is because a basic *ṭheka* can be too simple and dull to be used in any degree. There are a number of ways to create these variations; yet the most widespread are the ornamentation and alteration of the bols.

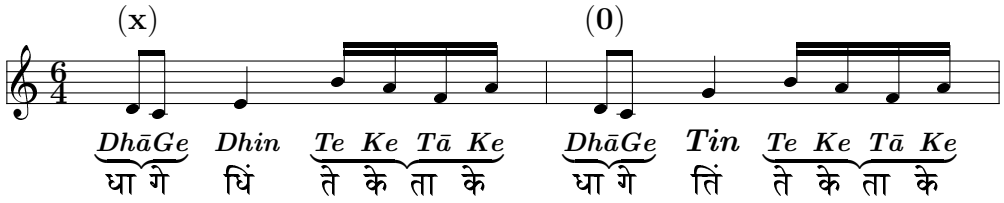
Ornamentation is the most common process for generating *prakar*s. This keeps the performance varied and maintains the interest of the audience. The basic *ṭheka* is a skeleton, while the *prakar* puts the flesh onto it. We can illustrate this with these two examples of *Dādrā*, see fig. 6.8.

The difference in moods between these two examples is clear. The first example, fig. 6.8(a), has a childlike simplicity and becomes monotonous after a while. Conversely, the second example, fig. 6.8(b), is more lively. It is important to keep in mind that this is nothing more than the original *ṭheka* with some ornamentation. This prakar would be mixed in with an indefinite number of similar improvisations to keep the performance moving at a lively pace.

Ornamentation is not the only process, for many times a *prakar* is formed by a complete change in the *bol*s. This is usually done for stylistic reasons. An example is illustrated in fig. 6.9, where the basic *Kaherava*, fig. 6.9(a), is compared with a *prakar* which is sometimes referred to as *bhajan kā ṭheka*, fig. 6.9(b). The relationship between this pair of *Kaherava ṭheka*s is very different from the relationship seen in the *Dādrā* examples. The basic *bol*s of



(a) Basic *Dādrā ṭheka*



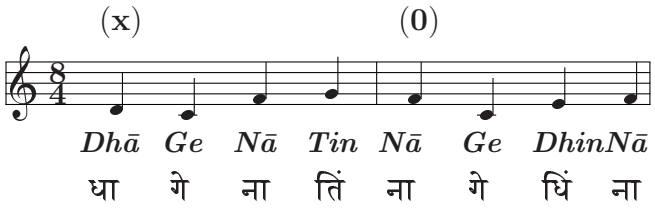
(b) *Dadra prakar*

Figure 6.8: A variation of *Dādrā ṭheka*

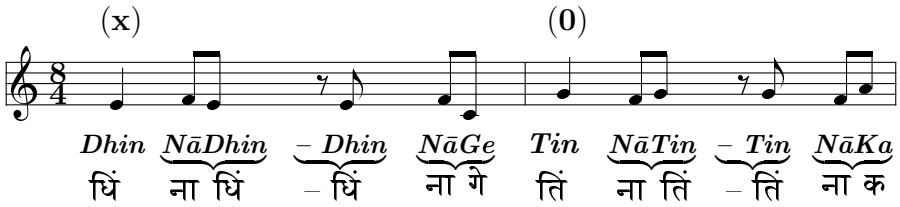
Kaherava are not contained in the *bhajan kā ṭheka*. This *prakar* represents a totally different interpretation. When there is a restructuring of the *bol*s it is sometimes called a *kisma*.

We have seen that *prakar* is the variation upon the *ṭheka*. This may be a simple ornamentation or it may be a totally different interpretation of the *tāl*.

There is an interesting relationship between the basic timekeeping and the performance. One may find alternation between blinding bursts of speed and slow simple accompaniment. Yet through all of these alternations, the basic rhythm usually does not change. Therefore, this sets up a situation where we have two rhythms going on simultaneously. One rhythm is the abstract basic *tāl* indicated by the claps and waves. The other one is the actual performed piece. The relationship between the performed and the abstract is referred to as *layakari*. Common *layakari* are single–time, double–time, triple–time, etc. One can also find interesting *layakari*s such as three–beats–over–two, seven–beats–over–four, etc.



(a) Basic *Kaherava ṭheka*



(b) *Bhajan kā ṭheka* (*Kaherava prakar*)

Figure 6.9: A variation of *Kaherava ṭheka*

6.2.3 *Tihai*

The *tihai* , sometimes called *tiya*, is the most typical of the Indian cadential forms. It is defined entirely by its structure, i.e. a *tihai* is essentially the repetition of a phrase three times. This triadic structure creates a rhythmic counterpoint which produces a strong sense of tension in a performance. The resolution on the *sam* provides the release. It is so important that the majority of Indian cadenzas are based upon the *tihai* at some level. Fig. 6.11 is an example of a *tihai* . In this example the phrase *TeRiKīṬaDhā–* is repeated three times. The last *Dhā* of the last iteration corresponds to the first beat of the next cycle.

The most common philosophy for the resolution of a *tihai* is to resolve upon the *sam*. The phrases of the *tihai* (referred to as *pāla*) may be linked in two ways. One way is to use a time interval between the three *pāla*s (phrases). This is called a *dumdar tihai* . *Dum* literally means "breath", but has the secondary meaning of a very small unit of time. The second approach has no gap between phrases. This is referred to as *bedum*. These two approaches are shown schematically in fig. 6.10.

The *bedum tihai* has a number of interesting characteristics. An example of a *bedum*

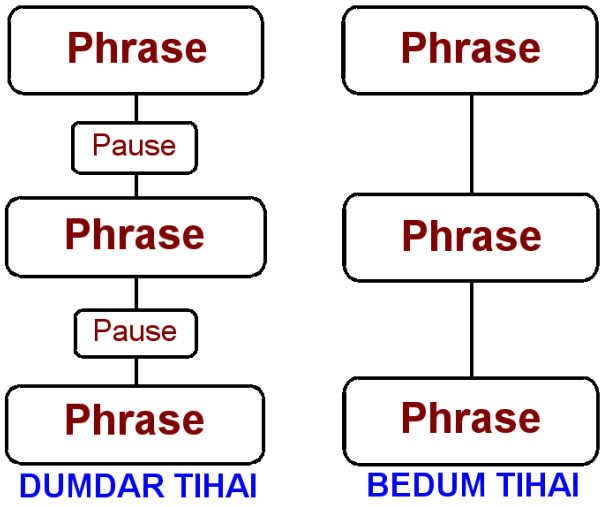


Figure 6.10: Structure of *Dumdar* and *Bedum Tihai*

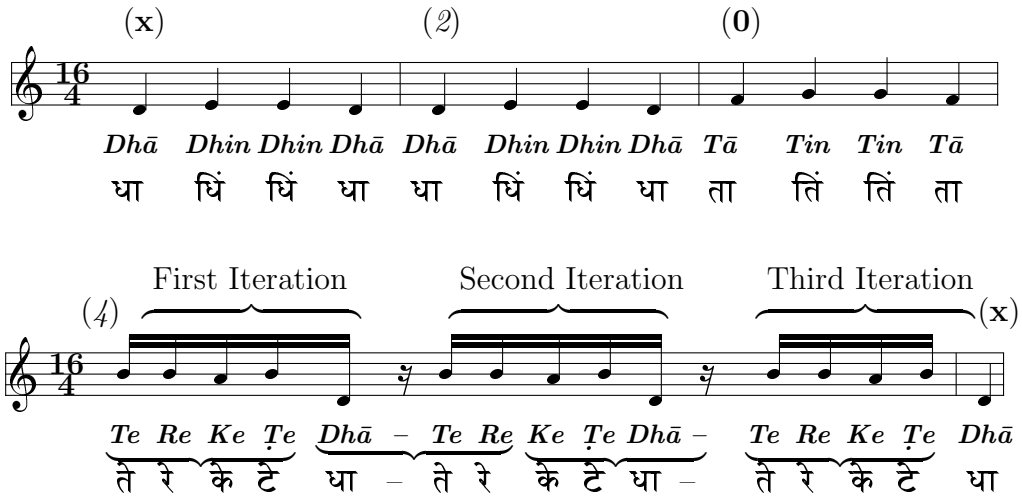


Figure 6.11: A *Dumdar tihai* in *Tintāl*

tihai is shown in fig. 6.12. The phrase *TiṬaKāṬaGaDiGeNeDhāTiDhā* is repeated three times without any interval between.

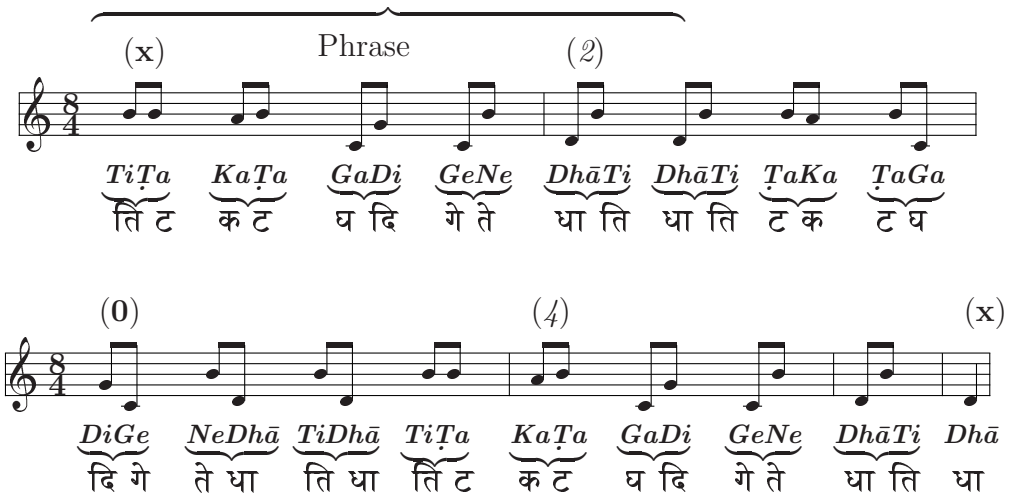


Figure 6.12: A *bedum tihai* in *Tintal*

6.3 *Gharana*s – The stylistic schools

Gharana (lit. "family–household") may be thought of as a school, style, or approach to the learning of an instrument and its performing practice.

Today this is concept is peculiar to north Indian music. It is linked to the very ancient concept of the *Guru–Shishya–Parampara* (linage of teacher / disciple) but with some interesting modern twists.

The names of the *gharana*s are almost always derived from a geographical location. This is usually the city, district or state that the founder lived in. Two examples are the *Gwalior Gharana* (vocal) or the *Farukhabad Gharana* (*tabla*). The *gharana* system as we think of it today is not really very old. Most of the *gharanas* today are not more than 100–300 years old. The modern *gharanas* are generally traceable to the period when the Mogul empire collapsed. *Gharanas* are found throughout the North in every field of dance, vocal and instrumental music.

Gharana has important significance for Indian musicians, singers and dancers because it stands for a particular artistic tradition having an established artistic creditability. There are *pakhāwaj*, *tabla*, *sitar*, or vocal *gharanas* which are widely recognized and aknowledged to be the most important because of having developed their own repertoires and individual

performing styles. The most highly esteemed performers of modern times are exponent of one of these musical traditions.

The *gharanas* were formerly the important centers of learning. In the professional sense a *gharana* had some of the characteristics of a guild. It was always understood that tracing one's lineage to a major *gharana* was a prerequisite for obtaining a position in the royal courts. The *gharanas* were entrusted with the duty of maintaining a certain standard of musicianship. The traditions were passed on by the descendents of the original founders and their disciples. It was generally expected, however, that the most in–depth teaching was to be given to the eldest son. But the family traditions were also passed on to disciples who exhibited special talent as this helped a *gharana* to strengthen and expand its reputation.

In the artistic sense the *gharana* is somewhat comparable to a "style" or "school". Over the years poor transportation and communication caused the various *gharanas* to adopt their own particular approach to presentation, technique and repertoire.

Today, as a result of increased communications and recordings, these traditions are no longer isolated and restricted to particular family groups. The stylistic differences are less discernable and more difficult to recognize as there are many performers who perform the repertoires of various *gharanas* and imitate the playing styles of other performers. Even so it is necessary for professional Indian musician to be able to identify with a particular tradition, so that it is still difficult for aspiring artists not affiliated with a *gharana* to pursue a professional career. As a matter of fact, when two Indian musicians meet, is not unusual to hear them introducing themselves saying first the name of the *gharana* they belong to.

In former times the *gharanas* jealously guarded their traditions. Even a father is known to have refrained from teaching his own son because he feared the son would then pass this information on to others outside the *gharana*. This attitude was prevalent in the past and it is still encountered in certain circles. This has lead to the loss of a great deal of older repertoire which was never written down or shared with other *gharana* members.

In the past few decades the *gharana* system has had a negative impact on the standard of musicianship. Improvements in communications have made it a professional imperative for musicians to have as broad of a background as possible. The secretive nature of the *gharana*

Figure 6.13: Musicians from the same *gharana* pose proudly

system coupled with the fact that *gharanas* tended to specialize in only one technique or approach is inconsistent with modern pedagogic and professional requirements. It is for this reason that many of the aspects of this system have been abandoned in modern music colleges in India.

Although each of the *gharanas* have their own minor variations, there are two major approaches for the drum playing; *Dilli* and *Purbi*. The *Dilli* style derives its name from Delhi. It is characterized by a strong emphasis on rim strokes and use of the middle finger. The *Purbi* style derives its name from the Hindi word *purab*. *Purab* means "Eastern" and reflects the fact that this style was popular in Lucknow, Benares, and other eastern parts of the country. The *Purbi* style is characterized by open hand strokes and a strong emphasis on material from *pakhāwaj*.

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