

Padmabhushan

Ustad Ahmad Jan Thirakwa

My whole life is an endeavour to live up to the ideals of my Guruji. He personified an entire era of tabla. Wherever Tabla is thought of, the name Ahmadjan Tirakwa stands at the forefront.

He was born in a musician's family of moradabad in the year 1891. he learnt Sarangi and singing until he was nine years old. His father then recognized that his ability was best suited to Tabla. So he was sent to Bombay to study Tabla at the feet of great Ustad munir Khan. After spending a few years studying the basics he went underground for seven years 'Vrat', practicing 18 hours a day under the guidance of Ustad Munir Khan. His elder brother assisted him in his 'Vrat'.

After this period of 'sadhana' he made an explosive debut at Bombay. News of Ahmadjan Thirakwa spread like a wild fire throughout India. At that time Tabla was merely an incidental to a main artist's performance.

New Dimensions

Thirakwa Saheb introduced new dimension to Tabla playing and created inexhaustible horizons for Tabla players to aspire to. He showed that Tabla can stand on its own as a solo instrument.

Soon after this he became associated with famous Natak Mandali of Pt. Bal Gandharva. They performed to packed houses; the majority came to listen to the great Ustad Ahmadjan Thirakwa.

During his tours with the Natak Mandali he came into contact with Tabla players of various styles & Gharanas. He continued

learning from each one until he became himself an authority in the four 'Bajs' of Tabla; delhi, Farrukhabad, Ajrada and Lucknow.

By the age of forty he became an ideal which every Tabla players aspire to. He was perfect in solo and in accompaniment.

Thiralwa Saheb altogether gave a new dimension to the solo presentation of Tabla. He gave it a sequence just as a singer or a sitarist would develop a Raga.

Personality

He was also wrestler, with a well-built-body. Always well dressed and with perfect manners, wherever he moved, he created an aura of majesty by his superb personality. Whenever he appeared on stage he invariably created a relaxed and easy atmosphere by his good sense of humor.

He was a God fearing man who endeavored to do his five 'namaz' each day. One of his prayer was that he should play Tabla every day until he died. His wish was granted; he gave his last performance on the 13th Jan 1975, the day he died.

On the death of this great man, Pt. Kishan Maharaj another great Tabla player of Varanasi said in this Television Interview, "with the death of Thirakwa the Sun of Tabla is now set....."

A historian wrote, "It well takes another five centuries to produce another such personality in the field of Tabla". Ustad Ahamadjan Thirakwa outlived many of his contemporaries, remaining on the stage more than sixty years, unparalleled in the field of Tabla.

It was in the year 1959, when he joined Bhatkhande Sangit Mahavidyalaya of Lucknow, as Head of the Department of percussions. I became his disciple. Since my childhood it was my dream that came true.

I learned and practiced ceaselessly at his feet for more than fifteen years. I collected immense material in the various styles of Tabla playing. This book is a result of my efforts to disseminate some knowledge among the inquisitive students of Tabla world.

Brief Introduction to Tabla

Tabla is an important percussion instrument of Indian Music. It is one of the most developed Tal-keeping drum. It is a combined name for Tabla and Dagga. Tabla is played by right hand and dagga with left hand.

Tabla is essentially an accompanying instrument to Vocal, Instrumental and Dance. It has gained so much popularity these days that Solo performance on Tabla is also upheld in almost every music conference. For its refined tonal quality and intricate rhythmic affect it has come in the forefront, leaving behind all other drums like Pakhawaj, Dholak and Naal etc.

History of Tabla is not that old as compared to Pakhawaj or Mridang. With the advent of Khayal and Thumri singing in the 16th century this drum got popularity.

There is a lot of controversy about the origin of Tabla. But it is generally accepted that the first known great Tabla Wizard was Ustad Siddhar Khan of Delhi.

It is Delhi Gharana of Tabla whose branches flourished in Ajrada, Lucknow, Farrukhabad and Banaras. Generations of Guru-Sishya parampara developed different styles of Tabla playing and various Gharanas came into existence. In Punjab, this are remained uninfluenced by Delhi Gharana. Punjab Gharana of Tabla is distinct and there we find independent lineage. Following are the six Gharanas of Tabla playing.

1. ***Delhi Gharana***
2. ***Ajarada Gharana***

3. ***Lucknow Gharana***
4. ***Farrukhabad Gharana***
5. ***Banaras Gharana***
6. ***Punjab Gharana***

Delhi Gharana

Majority of the Scholars believe that Delhi is the birth place of the Tabla.

Mougal Courts were the place for musicians to survive and as such, it is said that

Siddhar Khan was the first acknowledge great Tabla master who established the Delhi Gharana. Tabla became popular because of its soft melodic sound syllables which were more be-fitting in Khayal & Thumri style of singing. Mridanga or Pakhawaj which was prominent Taal Vadya for centuries, disappeared from the scene and Tabla captured the whole sphere of accompaniment to Vocal Instrumental and Dance also. In delhi Gharana Usthad Bugrah Khan, Usthad Sitab Khan, Bade Kale Khan, Usthad Naththu Khan are few names who contributed the style of this limege. These Usthads specialized Chanti ka Baj and gave maximum emphasis to PESKARA KAIDA & RELA, small GAT and soft MUKHRE and MUHRE are more prevent in Delhi Baj. Usthad Inam Ali Khan son of great Usthad Grami Khan is the living representative of this Gharana.

Ajarada Gharana

Ajarada is the name of a village of district Meruit where a branch of Delhi

Gharana was established by Usthad Kalu Khan and Miru Khan. These two brothers were the disciples of Usthad Sidhdhar Khan of Delhi. Usthad Chand Khan, Usthad Kale Khan, Usthad Shammu Khan and Usthad habibuddin Khan are the few names who enriched this branch of Delhi with there supperel innovations. Ajarada Baj is

much similar to Delhi Baj yet distinct for its different treatment of the composition. Ajarada style of Tabla playing is more attractive because the emphasis of the Banya Bol, complex Layakaries and phrases of combined Bols like 'Ghetak' 'Ding Dina Gina and Dha ghe ge Nak Dhina'. Ajarada is also famous for Tishra jati Kaida & Gat Kaidas.

Lucknow Gharana

Usthad Modu Khan and Usthad Bakshu Khan established Lucknow Gharana of Tabla. On the request of the Nawab of Lucknow Usthad Modu Khan came to Lucknow from Delhi. In the 19th century Lucknow became the cultural centre and eminent musicians of the time got patronage by Lucknow Nawabs. Are of Tabla playing in Lucknow developed with Kathak Dance and with the result new dimensions were given to the language of Tabla. Usthad Mohamad Khan, Usthad Munne Khan, Usthad Abid Hussain Khan contributed so much to this style of Tabla playing that it became entirely different to the Delhi style. PARANS, GAT, TUKADA and loud composition got prominency in this style of Tabla playing with more and more association with the Kathak dance Lucknow Tabla also developed LAGGI KA BAJ, Usthad Wajid Hussain Khan & his son Usthad Affsq Hussain Khan were the last great exponent of this Gharana. Ilmas Hussain Khan Son of Usthad Affaq is the present representative of this Gharana.

Farukhabad Gharana

Haji Villayat Ali Khan established this Gharana. He was married to the daughter of Usthad Bakshu Khan of Lucknow Gharana. It is said Farukhabad Gharana is a branch of Lucknow Gharana. Usthad Salari Khan, Usthad Imam Baksh, Usthad Munir Khan are few names whose innovation in the art Tabla playing gave recognition to this Gharana. Usthad Ahamad jan Thirakwa, Usthad Masit Khan and his son Karamat Hussain Khan became the Tabla wizards of 20th

Century. It is said that the Farukhabad style of Tabla playing is the essence of

Delhi, Lucknow, Ajarada Gharana. Farukabad style is the expertise of 'Chanti' 'Lab' and 'Syahi Bols'. Beautiful GAT, CHALAN, REKA & RAU get prominence in this style. Usthad Ahamad Jan Thirakwa added much popularity to Farukabad style of Tabla playing. He evolved a fresh and new system of Tabla solo playing out of his inexhaustible reservoir of compositions. In Farukabad style Tabla playing is a combined expression of soft and robust phrases. Special composition of Dhir Dhir Kit Tak and RELAS of Syahi Bols.

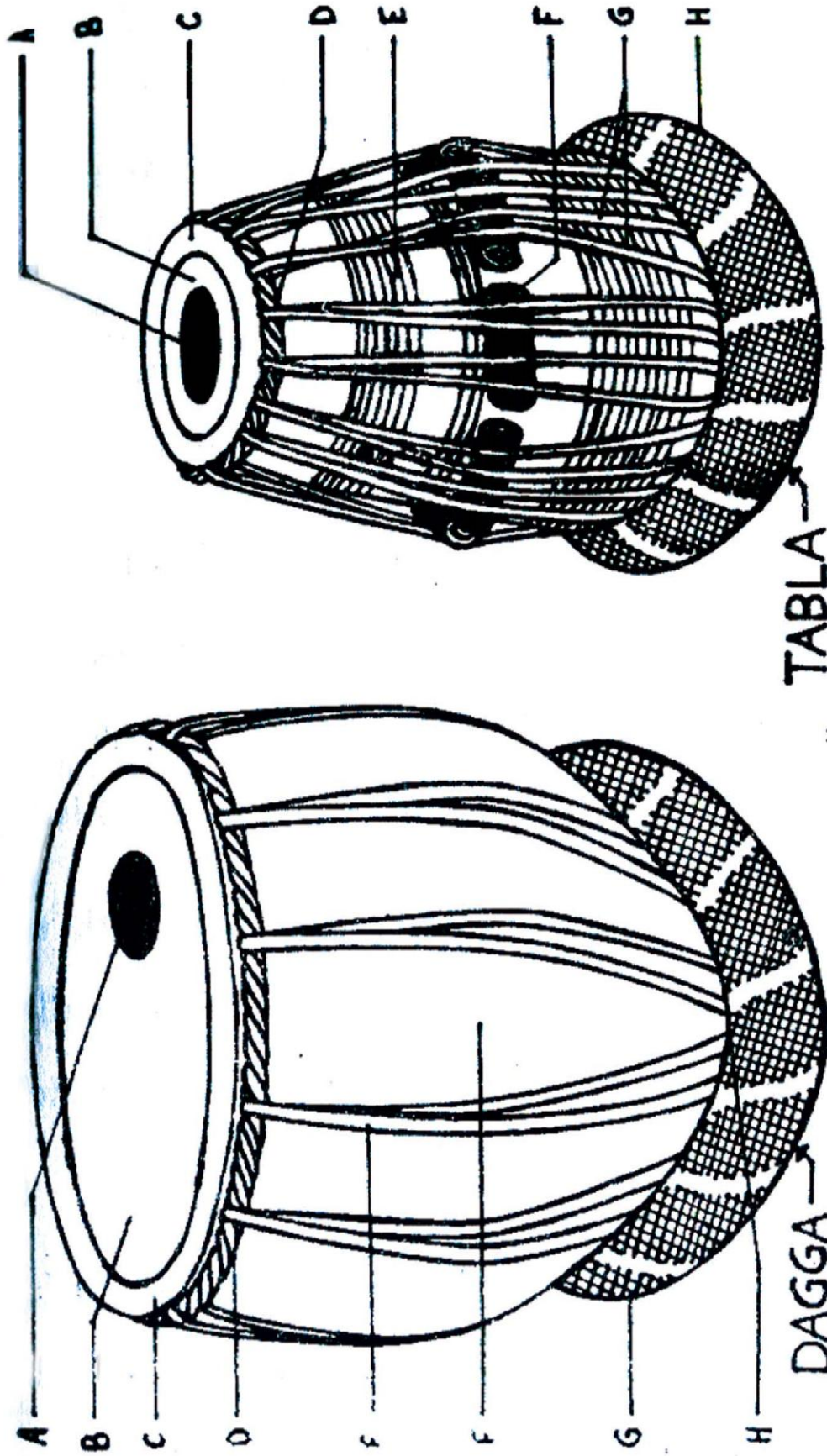
Banaras Gharana

Pt. Ram Sahai disciple of Usthad Modu Khan of Lucknow established the Banaras Gharana of Tabla playing. Banaras has been a very old traditional cultural seat of U.P. Pt. Ram Sahai belonged to a family of musicians Kathak Dancers & Sarangi players. His family had rich heritage of music from his ancestors. Pt. Bhiron Sahai, Pt. Durga Sahai, Kanthe Maharaj, Sannta Ptassad, Anokhe Lal became famous Tabla wizards of the century. These Tabla exponents gave altogether new dimension to the art of Tabla playing. They included the all phrases and composition of other percussion instrument like Pakhawaj, Dholak, Tasha, Nagara and khol etc. and also gave emphasis to poetry Chhand and Kavitta in Tabla playing Dev-stuti and Kathak dance composition get more prominence in the solo playing of this style. Banaras has produced a number of great Tabla players internationally acknowledged. Banaras Baj has very wide range of phrases & composition. It is very forceful loud and robust style of Tabla playing. GATS, CHHAND & PARAN LAGGI & LADI are the main features of their Baj.

Punjab Gharana

Punjab Gharana of Tabla is the only Gharana which is independent and has no bound with Delhi Gharana. It can be said that it is the most ancient Tabla Gharana. Lala Bhavani Das is the

pioneer maestro of Punjab Gharana. He invented a new Baj on DUKKAD, a folk instrument which has both shells made of wood and on the left (Banya) they use flour dough. Their style of playing is much nearer to Pakhawaj playing. Kadir Baksh, Fakir Baksh, Miya Hussain Bakshi, Karam Illahi are the prominent name of this Gharana. In the modern time Usthad Alla Rakha & his son Zakhir Hussain is the representative of this Gharana. Because of the Pakhawaj's strong influence on this Gharana their playing is bit vigorously forceful and open and use of forefingers of the right hand is excessively prominent. Combination of Layakari is intricate and long compositions are used. Bandish and compositions of Punjab Gharana have evidence of their language and their peculiar pronunciation. Instead of KAIDA they give importance to GAT & RELA that too with very difficult and loaded layakaries. The skilful handling of Meend on Baya is the specialties of Punjab Gharana. Force & speed is important in this style.



DAGGA → A-Syahi, B-Maydan, C-Gote, D-Gajra, E-Doori, F-Koodi, G-Indul, H-Gudri
TABLA → A-Syahi, B-Lav, C-Chaanil, D-Gajra, E-Shell, F-Gatta, G-Baddhi, H-Indul

Description of Tabla & Dagga

Tabla:

It is made of wooden shell. Vijaisal and Sheesham are the best wood to make the shell for Tabla. Normally Neem, Mango or Khair wood is used.

Height of the wooden shell should be 10 inches and top circum-ference between 5 to 6 inches.

This wooden shell's top is covered with skin. This is called Porri or Palli. In the center of this Poori a black round Syahi is given. Syahi is an important factor in determining the pitch of Tabla.

The Poori is stretched on the shell with the help of thin leather stripes. These stripes are called Baddhi. They should be of thick skin and 10 meters in length.

Eight round wooden blocks are fastened between the Baddhi & Shell they are called Gattas. With the help of these Gattas Tabla is tuned.

Dagga:

Dagga or the base drum is bigger than Tabla. It was made of Clay in olden times. These days Brass Bronze or steel is used to make Dagga's shall. A good Dagga is 10" high, 9" on top and around 3 Kg. of weight.

The Dagga shell is also covered with skin. Syahi is also there but on one side, nearer to the end of Poori.

The skin-stripes or strong thin rope is used to stretch the Poori. Like Tabla, Gattas are not used in construction of Dagga. Instead, in case of rope, round rings are used.

A pair of rings, called “Indwis” and a hammer for tuning the Tabla is also required.

Basic Ten Syllables

There are only ten main sound Symbols for Tabla. Out of those ten syllables, all Tabla compositions are made.

The following six syllables are for right hand:

1. ***Ta or Na***
2. ***Ti or Tin***
3. ***Din or Thun***
4. ***Tun or Tu***
5. ***Te or Tay***
6. ***Ray or Re***

The following two are for left hand:

1. ***Ghay or Gay***
2. ***Kay or Ki or Kat or Kaa***

The following two are produced by both hands:

1. ***Dha***
2. ***Dhin***

These are alphabets of Tabla-language. One should produce these very carefully on Tabla & Dagga to get the correct musical sounds.

Tuning of Tabla

Normally Tabla is tuned to the key note of the singer. Sometimes it is also tuned in madhyam or Pancham swar. For tuning the Tabla one should have musically sensitive ears. Right method of tuning is to strike with your right hand and hammer with your left hand. Start from one spot, tune it to your required note then take the opposite spot (ghar) and tune it. Thus 1st & 8th ghar of the Poori is tuned then tune the 4th & 12th ghar and thereafter tune the remaining ghars slowly and patiently.

To get higher note, hammer the Gattas to down side and for lower note to upside. Slight difference of note is removed by striking the hammer on Gazra. Take care that hammer is not striking anywhere on Baddhi.

Dagga is tuned to the base key note. Generally it is seen people only see that it is sounding on a very low pitch. The Dagga's sound should be somewhere corresponding with Tabla's sound.

How to practice for sweetness in Tabla playing

There is a prescribed method for practicing Tabla. You can get better results if practice slowly, regularly and patiently. One composition at a time, in slow speed and continuously without break. Each syllable of the composition must be carefully produced.

Clarity, speed and tonal quality should be constantly maintained while practicing.

You should also listen to the sound you produce on Tabla.

Practice with full concentration as if you are doing Pooja or prayer.

Counting of Beats must be constantly maintained while practice.

Sitting Position and correct posture for Tabla-Playing

It is very important for Tabla-player to know the correct posture. Like Padmassan or Veerasan, the Yogic Asans, the player should sit with back erected. Hands should be stretched forward to the pair of Tabla. Right-wrist should always remain above the level of Tabla. Elbows should not rest on any part of your body.

One should form a habit from the beginning to sit with his face quite up, looking to the audience and having no tension on face or any part of body. It is noticed in general, the beginners hide their face or shrug their shoulders or do some odd while they try to play.

In correct posture, one can communicate to his audience better and entertain them maximum by his tabla playing.

Art of Accompaniment

A Tabla player should always remember that his work is to keep the Taal and help the main artist to bring out his best. Time to time he has to put his skill of Layakari to increase the affect of the performance.

Sangat or accompaniment is of two kinds. One is called “Larant” another is “Sawal Jawab”. In the first kind the Tabla player should be very prompt and ready to go together with the singer or player in his improvisations. Only talented and experienced artists can do it.

In the second kind of Sangat, Tabla player waits until the singer completes the one improvisation and then he gives reply with a similar work. In this he should have the capacity to compose spontaneously. Command on Tall and Layakaris is essential for a good accompanist. Hand should also be prepared to reach any and every required speed. Tabla player must also know about the balance of right and left hands.

How to give a Tabla Solo performance

You must first think of the time duration of your Tabla Solo item and the material you have at hand, ready to play.

The prescribed way of solo is to put the things in following order:

Peshkara, Kayada with it's Paltas, Gats, Taukras, Parans, rela & Tihais. Increase the Laya and give few special compositions like Chakra paran, Kamal paran, Dumuhi Gat and Tihai of Tihais etc.

You should select the Laya in which you can show your best skill of Layakari. The material should be arranged in such a way that is no monotony in expression. The total performance should be in an ascending line, reaching to the climax. You can also peak few compositions showing the Taal by clapping.

Notation Symbols and How to Write Different Layakaris

The following symbols are used for notation:

X = This is to show "Sam". As we know the Sam is the first beat of the Taal and it is that important point where singer and Tabla player meet again and again.

O = This is the sing of "Khali". This helps singer or player to know his position in the time cycle.

***— — — — —
— 2 — — — 3 —***

Vertical line in the above is the sing of division.

Numbers like 2, 3 are to show the Taali.

S = This is the sing of prolonged duration of a Beat.

This is called “Avagraha”. It also helps in writing Layakaris.

In writing half Beat or quarter Beat the Avagraha plays a vital role.

For example:

Dha in half Beat S, Dha

Dha in quarter Beat SSS, Dha

To write 3 Beats in two 1S2 S3S

To write 2 Beats in three 1S 1S SS

To write 5 Beats in four 1SSS2 SSS3S SS4SS S5SSS

***To write 7 Beats in four 1SSS2SS S3SSS4S SS5SSS6
SSS7SSS***

Note: After Avagraha if coma is put that means the division of the particular Matra is equal value.

Few Definitions

Matra :- It is the time measuring unit in music. Regular matras, make the Laya. Number of matras determines time-cycle or Taal.