

# Application of Abstract Music in the Tabla Accompaniment in Purabang Thumri Gayaki with Special Reference to Farukhabad Gharana

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## ABSTRACT

The literal meaning of the term Abstract denotes to something that is undefined, unclassified and unique in its very way of expression. As Art gets diverted into two streams of visual and performing arts, the abstract forms of these two streams find its own dimensions. Abstract music develops as an art form which uses the abstract elements of sound and divisions of time to represent the nonrepresentational context of the art. Thus an analytical study is made with the help of tools like books, journals, online materials along with audio and video samples. In the scenario of World Music, the term was not coined until 1846 where it was first used by Richard Wagner in a programme to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. On the contrary, Hindusthani classical music has nurtured a strong essence of abstraction from its very nascent days. Beginning from Dhrupad while the music has travelled and emerged into khayal and later into further different forms like Thumri, Tappa, Kajri, Chaiti etc, along with the development of different taalās for percussion repertoires, improvisational ability has remained its soul and sole importance. The same Thumri or the Tabla accompaniment from the same Gharana is improvised and gets presented by the same artiste in several unique dimensions and colours each and every time. Music in that way seems more abstract than other forms of art because it represents states of emotion, symmetry and repetition, and other intangibles. And just because these qualities can't be seen or touched, doesn't make them any less real. Hindusthani music emerges to be one of the most abstract forms of music as it represents an artiste's imaginations and emotions in its every dimension...and nothing can be more abstract than human imaginary power and emotional context.

## 1. Introduction

The literal meaning of the term Abstract denotes to something that is undefined, unclassified and unique in its very way of expression. As Art gets diverted into two streams of visual and performing arts, the abstract forms of these two streams find its own dimensions. Any art has to refer back to sensory impressions of the world, internal or external; because that's the only raw material we have to work with. Meanwhile, it is relatively unlikely to ever mistake a work of representational art for the object it represents. Photographs or photorealistic paintings are not mistaken for their subjects. Abstract music develops as an art form which uses the abstract elements of sound and divisions of time to represent the nonrepresentational context of the art.

### 1.1 Abstract Music

Abstract music, often known as Absolute music, is a form of music that is not explicitly "about" anything; in contrast to program music, it is non-representational. The idea of absolute music developed at the end of the 18th century in the writings of authors of early German Romanticism, such as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffmann but the term was not coined until 1846 when it was first applied by Richard Wagner in a programme to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The aesthetic notions underlying the idea of absolute music originate from debates over the relative value of what were known in the early years of

aesthetic theory as fine arts. Kant, in his Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, dismissed music as "more enjoyment than culture" because of its lack of conceptual content, thus ironically taking as a negative the very feature of music that others would celebrate. Johann Gottfried Herder, in contrast, regarded music as the highest of the arts because of its spirituality, which Herder linked to the invisibility of sound.

On the contrary, Hindusthani classical music has nurtured a strong essence of abstraction from its very nascent days. Beginning from *Dhrupad* while the music has travelled and emerged into *Khayal* and its different forms and ultimately bloomed in forms like *thumris*, along with the development of different *taalās* for percussion repertoires, improvisational ability has remained its soul and sole importance. . In Hindusthani Music the uniqueness and improvisational quality of a composition has remained the primary factor. The same Raga or the same *taala* is improvised and gets presented by the same artiste in several unique dimensions and colours each and every time.

### 1.2 Application of Abstract Music in Purabang Thumri

Indian Classical Music is one of the oldest art forms of India and is one of the richest heritages of this country. This particular genre of music is regarded as one of the most intricate, content rich yet soulful among all the musical genres throughout the world. From the earliest days, vocal rendition of the music has occupied a principal role in the tradition of

Hindusthani Music. And along with the progression of human civilization, the music has seen a lot of changes in its structure, content and approach. With the advent of time, Hindusthani vocal music has evolved into different branches and sub-branches of classical as well as semi classical like *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar*, *Khayal* and *Thumri*, *Kajri*, *Chaiti*, *Tappa* etc. respectively (Dutta, 2003). With the political and social changes in India, changes occurred in its art and culture along with the music, dance and other forms of performing arts. Vocal music especially travelled along way from *Dhrupad* to *Khayal* to *Khayal* repertoires mingling with regional vocal forms (Manuel, 1989). *Thumri* is one of such semi-classical vocal forms said to have begun in Awadh, Uttar Pradesh in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1847–1856). The lyrics are typically composed in a proto-Hindi language called *Brij Bhasha* and are usually romantic (Talwar, 2007). Traditionally *Tabla*, *Sarengi* and *Harmonium* remain as the principal accompanying instruments for the rendition of a *thumri*. (Mudgal, 2013). Each and every time a particular *thumri* is performed, it takes a new shape and new dimensions are explored as the whole performance depends on the artist's imagination thus adding absolute abstract elements to it.

### 1.3 Application of Abstract Music in *Tabla* Accompaniment

Traditionally for practicing and performing this vocal music, apart from the *Tanpura*, there is an immense importance of some other accompanying instruments and accompanists. Any vocal performance is incomplete without the proper '*Saath Sangat*' of its accompanists. Among the accompanying instruments, generally, the rhythm or '*Taal*' support is given by *Tabla* or *Pakhawaj* while the *Harmonium*, *Sarengi* or *Violin* follows and imitates the vocalist. Simultaneously, it can be mentioned that while the melody instruments like *Sarengi* / *Harmonium* / *Violin* creates the background for the vocalist, it is the *taal* section comprising of *Tabla* or *Pakhawaj* which acts as a complementary to the vocal music and is virtually inseparable from a vocal performance. In *Purabang Thumri* the *Tabla* is the principal accompanying percussion. Accompanying a *thumri* is always challenging for a *tabla* player as the whole performance is abstract and he has to follow the vocalist's imaginations and sentiments. The legendary *tabla* maestro Pt. Shankar Ghosh states in his book *Anaddha*: While accompanying, a *tabla* player requires much more intelligence and dexterity in his performance than that of *tabla* solo playing. Accompanying vocal music is the challenging-most role for a *tabla* player and it needs much more maturity and knowledge of vocal music to do so. *Thumri* accompaniment is an essential part for a *tabla* player. For a good vocal accompaniment *bayan* is the most essential part as it is through *bayan* and difference in pressures of wrist that the modulation in *thekas* occurs. (Ghosh S. , 1994). While accompanying a *thumri* when the *tabla* player is given his part to play he must try to follow the similar sentiment of the song and create his imaginations. That is why the *laggi* sections of a *thumri* are always weaved into patterns along with the *tabla* player's imaginations turning it into another form of abstract music. Author Ramakrishna Das aptly states in his article *Secrets of Taala* and *Tabla* accompaniment: *Tabla* accompaniment needs a sharp mind and the ability of understanding the main artist's taste and requirement. To do this, the accompanist should have a thorough knowledge of the art (Das, 2006).

## 2. Review of Related Literature

When the term *Abstract Music* is explored, the principle relationship that appears is between human consciousness and music. Musicologist David Clarke and Eric Clarke states in their article *Music and Consciousness : A continuing project* : Paying due attention to the structured temporality of music, then, might help bring a much needed focus to the key dimension of time in the constitution of consciousness. Music might have further grounds for its claim to a strong relationship to consciousness—based on the way that it combines social, conceptual, technical, emotional, perceptual and motor attributes; the way that it is distributed in/around societies; the high value that is placed upon it in many cultures; the fact that it seems not to be the official medium of communication in any culture—and therefore perhaps escapes formalized social controls, arguably remaining closer to a less obviously ideologically regulated imprint/reflection of 'what it is like to be at Arts & Humanities in Higher Education 13(1–2)human' (in the spirit of Thomas Nagel's (1974) essay, 'What is it like to be a bat?'). Moreover, philosophers, psychologists and musicologists from many very different perspectives have argued that music has the capacity both to reflect human subjectivity and to be a powerful element in constituting it. These points indicate a prima facie case for music as offering significant insights into consciousness—with a further important complementary perspective on that relationship. If music has a special relationship to consciousness, we might also ask: What can we discover, explore or claim about the specific nature of musical consciousness? What kinds of musical consciousness are there? How do they come about? What do they mean? What is their significance? Is there even such a thing as 'musical consciousnesses'?

Accompaniment being an indispensable part of the vocal rendition of the Indian Classical Music, the accompanying instruments and their playing stylizations play an extremely important role making it evident how important is an accompanist's sensibilities and ideas important for a successful accompaniment making the art completely abstract.

The main function of the *tabla* in accompaniment is to keep time for the main. Upon careful scrutiny of any *tabla* player's accompaniment of different artists, one may even recognize distinct changes in accompaniment style with each artist, as well as each *raaga*. Such is the hallmark of a sensitive and artistically empathetic accompanist. (Gopikrishna, 2016).

## 3. Objective

1. To analyse the *Theka* part of the *Tabla* accompaniment in *Purabang Thumri Gayaki* and find out the application of *Abstract Music* in it.
2. To analyse the *Laggi* part of the *Tabla* accompaniment in *Purabang Thumri Gayaki* and find out the application of *Abstract Music* in it.

## 4. Methodology

An analytical study is made with the help of tools like books, journals, online materials along with audio and video samples.

## 5. Analysis

With the evolution of the Hindusthani Classical Music, gradually, other different forms of it have found their own identities. Like the *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar* or *Khayal*, lighter subjects like *Thumri*, *Kajri*, *Chaiti*, *Tappa*, *Bhajan* etc have found their own modifications with time too. Since the older days, gradually they have managed to secure a respectable place in the classical music society and are being included in a performance set list of almost every artiste. The audience too expects a rendition of a lighter form succeeding a serious *Khayal* from an artiste in a performance. Naturally, while more number of artistes from more number of gharanas start exploring a particular form of music, it automatically collects various influences and ultimately ends up blooming to its full. Among all these lighter forms of music, *Thumri*, has evolved the most and have ended up in getting the highest influence from *Khayal* in it. When its gathering influences from *Khayal*, automatically it is virtually adding more and more abstractness to it.

For analysing the influence of Abstract music on *thumri* accompaniment, the following three *thumri* performances by *Vidushi Girija Devi* are chosen. To portray the influence in a clearer way, the vocalist and the accompanying *tabla* player's gharana, i.e. *Farukhabad Gharana*, remain constant. The three samples have three different *tabla* accompanists. The accompanists themselves are prominent figures in the

1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
Dha	Dhin	_	Dha	Dha	Thin	_			
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	1		
Ta	Tin	_	Dha	Dha	Dhin Na	TeKre	Dha	-	{i}

Throughout the *Thumri* he plays this same *theka* without any other variations accompanying the mood of the *thumri* perfectly. At certain times he adds a *Dha* or a *Kre* in the latter micro beats of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> beat of the *theka* to fulfill the gap and help the *theka* to roll on to the next *matra* with a proper stroke.

### Analysis of the Laggi:

The *Laggi* section starts from 6:59 minute and plays till 9:58 minute. In the *Laggi* section the *tabla* player shifts from 14 beats *Jat* to 8 beats *Keherwa* cycle. Initially he starts with the *Madhyalaya Teentaal theka*. Then slowly unfolds the variations of *Farukhabad laggis*. As the tempo increases slowly, he brings in the famous *Laggi: DhaGhe\_GheNakreDhina*. Here onwards the swift and melodious *Laggis* are played one after other. The playing styles of the *Laggis* clearly show that they are being played as pure improvisations and are being played according to the mood and progression of the song. *Laggis* like *Dhatunana*, *Dha – kreNakeGhena* are performed. It must be noted here that within the *laggis* the *tabla* player comes back to the *madhyalaya teentaal theka* twice and sticks to it for a while as the vocalist does certain portions of *vistaar*. As it finishes he again returns towards playing faster variants of *laggis*. This instance of returning to the *teentaal theka* and again coming back to the *laggi* is not the one practiced generally. The more popular idea of *laggi* is that once it is taken

mentioned gharana. The three samples are chosen from three different decades, marking a major span of the vocalist's performing career to bring out the essence of *Thumri* accompaniment in different eras of music.

### I. Vidushi Girija Devi with Ustad Shaikh Dawood (Farukhabad Gharana): Audio:

Artiste: Vidushi Girija Devi

Accompanists: Ustad Sheikh Dawood - *Tabla*

Ustad Chanda Hussaini - *Sarengi*

Thumri: *Itni Araj More Maan Re*

Raag: *Khamaj*

Taal: *Jat 14 beats*

Year: 1975

Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkTT0A8wOMY>

Using his expertise, the researcher analyses the audio sample. The analysis is done in the following manner:

### Analysis of the Theka:

In the *theka* portion, *Ustad Sheikh Dawood* plays an extremely poised *theka* throughout the *thumri*. He plays the 14 beat *Jat* with an extremely clean undisturbed *theka*. All the *bols* or syllables of the *theka* remain undisturbed with minimum use of *Khanapuris* or *Alankaras*. The *Theka* goes like:

it will unfold into different faster variants without really retuning to the initial ideas. But here the accompanist breaks that notion and follows his musical mind. This makes it clear how abstractness can influence a musician to make him apply his ideas in his performance. Towards the very end from 9.36, *Ustad Sheikh Dawood* shifts to the *laggi Dhene Ghene Naktak Dhene Ghene Dhene Ghene* with *Naktak* on *Sur*. And finally it finished with a *tihai* from *Sam* to *Sam*. The *Laggi* part of the performance brings out the real essence of improvisation of a *tabla* accompaniment in a *thumri*.

### II .Vidushi Girija Devi with Ustad Nizamuddin Khan (Farukhabad Gharana): Audio:

Artiste: Vidushi Girija Devi

Accompanists: Ustad Nizamuddin Khan (*Tabla*)

Thumri: *Nahak Laye Gawanwa*

Raag: *Bhairavi*

Taal: *Deepchandi*

Year: 1981

Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Xxe88\\_Trhg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Xxe88_Trhg)

Using his expertise, the researcher analyses the audio sample. The analysis is done in the following manner:

Analysis of the *Theka*:

In the theka portion, Ustad Nizamuddin Khan plays a flamboyant theka of the Deepchandi. While the actual theka is played with amazing balance and extreme soulful application of

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
Dha Dhin - Tekre | Dha Dha Thin -Tekre |

8 9 10 11 12 13 14 1  
Na Tin - Tekre | Dha Dha Dhin - Tekre || Dha - (ii)

The Theka portion runs from 00: 27 to 05: 44 minutes. Here Ustad Nizamuddin Khan perfectly blends his musical accompaniment with the mood and appeal of the thumri. Though the theka is played in *Vilambit* Deepchandi, the *Chalan* or temperament of the Taala is slightly faster than compared to *Vilambit* Jat. Ustad Nizamuddin Khan here chooses the apt

13 14 1  
Dha – TekreDhinNa | DhathiTagDheneDhaDhati || Dha

At 01:12 minute he uses another almost similar mukhra on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> beats:

13 14 1  
Dhin -KreDhinNa | DhathiTagDheneDhaDhati || Dha

Again at 01: 45 minute, he plays a mukhra using the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> beats, but uses *tisrajati* or *aarlaya* in contrast to the *barabarlaya* to look it even more attractive and exciting. The bols he uses are:

13 14 1  
Dhagena Dhatekre Dhetete Dhagena | Dhathi Ghaghetak Dhinedhina Ghena || Dha

Again at 02:17 minute he plays this khanapuri on the 14<sup>th</sup> beat of the theka:

14 1  
| Ta - Dha - TereketetakaTakateretekete || Dha

Throughout the theka portion he mixes and matches these khanapuris in context to the thumri and decorates it. This is where it reflects the application of abstractness in his accompaniment. Even in the theka portion which is generally played as a fixed loop the tabla player applies his musicality and musicianship to decorate and bring variations to suit the mood and temperament of the thumri.

#### Analysis of the Laggi:

The Laggi section starts from 05: 44 minute and runs till 06: 47 minute. In the Laggi section the tabla player shifts from 14 beats Deepchandi to 8 beats Keherwa cycle. Initially He starts with the Madhyalaya Teentaal theka. Then slowly unfolds the variations of Farukhabad Laggis. As the tempo increases slowly, he brings in different forms of laggis with more applications of Kinar and Bayan. Bols like *Ka*, *Na* and *Dhiga* are more in vogue at this section. From here the tabla smoothly brings in the famous laggi - *Dha Ti Dha Dha Dha Thun Na Na*. Along with it, as a continuation, laggis like *Dha Thun Na Na*, *Dhati Dha Dha*, *Dhati Chet Ta* etc are played. Finally Ustad Nizamuddin Khan unfolds his famous laggi - *Dhathunakre TagDhinaghre* and moves towards completion with a tihai.

the bayan, he also keeps adding different small *khanapuris* and *tiahis* to decorate the actual theka – especially the *mukhra* section. The Deepchandi theka in the audio goes like:

bols and materials to suit this temperament and applies the *khanapuris* accordingly. He principally places his decorations on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> beats together and sometimes on the 14<sup>th</sup> beat itself. For example at 00:42 he uses the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> beats and plays the mukhra:

The most amazing fact here is that the whole laggi plays for about 1 minute and it's a pleasure to the ears of the audience how within such a short span of time a laggi can be played with such highly compact compositional value along with such neatness and impact. The playing styles of the Laggis clearly show that they are being played as pure improvisations and are being played according to the mood and progression of the song. This proves how the improvisational and imaginative quality of an accompanist can influence a performance making the presence and application of abstractness clearly evident.

### III. Vidushi Girija Devi with Ustad Sabir Khan (Farukhabad Gharana): (Video):

**Artiste: Vidushi Girija Devi**

**Accompanists: Ustad Sabir Khan (Tabla)**

**Sarwar Hussain (Sarengi)**

**Thumri: Babul Mora Naihar Chhut Jaaye**

**Raag: Bhairavi**

**Taal: Addha**

**Year: 2016**

**Link:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSWHk76XhO8>

Using his expertise, the researcher analyses the audio sample. The analysis is done in the following manner:

*Analysis of the Theka:*

The theka portion starts from 46: 56 minute and continues till 50: 00 minute. In the theka portion, Ustad Sabir Khan plays

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Dha	-Dhi	-Ne	Dha	Dha	-Dhi	-Ne	Dha	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	1
Na	-Ti	-Ne	Ta	Ta	-Dhi	-Ne	Dha	Dha

Throughout the Thumri he plays this same theka without any other variations accompanying the mood of the thumri perfectly. At certain times he barely adds a *Dha* or a *Kre*.

*Analysis of the Laggi:*

1	2	3	4	
ChaTi	NeTa	Nak	Thene	
5	6	7	8	1
ChaTi	NeTa	Nak	Dhene	Dha

As a continuation he brings its *Duhra*:

1	2	3	4	
Chaki	TeCha	KiTe	Thene	
5	6	7	8	1
Chaki	TeNa	Nak	Dhene	Dha

And its further variations:

1	2	3	4	
Chaki	TeCha	KiTe	Thene	
5	6	7	8	1
NaNa	KeNa	Nak	Dhene	Dha

But after these variations Ustad Khan ends quickly with a *tihai* and returns to the *Keherwa* theka. He carries on with the

1	2	3	4	
DhaTi	TaDhe	NeTe	NaTi	
5	6	7	8	1
TaTi	TaDhe	NeTe	DhaTi	Dha

He continues this *laggi* as the vocalist does some *vistaar* part and finally ends the performance with a *Tihai*. His applications and introductions of compositions show how his music is improvised and not predetermined. The compositions which he is playing are traditional and age old. But the way

an extremely serene and simple theka throughout the thumri perfectly matching the poised and serene temperament of the song. He plays the 16 beat *Addha* or *Sitarkhani* with an extremely clean undisturbed theka. All the bols or syllables of the theka appear beautifully with a perfect balance of the *Dayan* and *bayan* while the theka remains undisturbed with minimum use of *Khanapuris* or *Alankaras*. The Theka goes like:

The *Laggi* section starts from 50:01 minute and plays till 51:33 minute. In the *Laggi* section the Ustad Sabir Khan shifts from 16 beats *Adhha* to 8 beats *Keherwa* cycle. Initially He starts with the *Madhyalaya Teentaal* theka for some time. . Then suddenly goes directly into a traditionally common *laggi* of the *Farukhabad Gharana*:

theka for a few cycles and then returns again to the faster *laggi*:

application is purely abstract and are being done totally on the spot.

**6. Discussion :**

From analysing the three samples an idea is obtained how accompanying any thumri can be treated by three different accompanists in different dimensions. Three different thumris of the same vocalist with three different accompanists – all from Farukhabad Gharana - are chosen to analyse how the

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
Dha Dhin \_ | Dha Dha Thin \_ |

8      9      10      11      12      13      14      1  
Ta Tin \_ | Dha Dha Dhin \_ || Dha

We have seen earlier in (i) and (ii) how the instant improvisations from the accompanist can bring different flavours in the theka. During the analysis we have seen in the other instances also how small khanapuris and alankaras can bring different dimensions in the actual theka. This treatment of the theka of a song is purely abstract. It is totally on the musicality and imagination of the accompanist to place a particular kind of materials he wants to place inside the theka.

And the laggi parts unfold this application of abstractness even further. All the three tabla players chosen are established maestros of the Farukhabad Gharana. Analysing the laggi parts of the three samples above establishes how much the accompanists are influenced by the mood of the vocalist and the flow of the songs, improvising their laggis accordingly. Exactly as tabla maestro Pt. Nayan Ghosh states the importance of tabla accompaniment and laggis in a seminar of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy: "It is very important that a tabla player must understand vocal music. It is very important to empathize with the main artiste" (Ghosh N., 2003). In this context it also can be mentioned that weaving a laggi in the older days were influenced not only by the vocal rendition, but also the dance related to it. Dance was an intrinsic part of a performance. The thumris were often staged along with a kathak dance. Moreover, mostly, the vocalists themselves were the dancers and they performed singing and dancing together. Naturally the dancing had a huge influencing in the contemporary tabla accompaniment of a thumri. Dr. Aneesh Pradhan can be stated from his article The Reality of the Accompanist: "When a thumri was performed, dance played an important part of the rendition. The tabla player had to reproduce, anticipate and suggest rhythmic passages that were in tandem with the singer-dancer's footwork. This section

improvising mind of an accompanist works. The performances are chosen from different decades to make this even clearer. During the theka section it's seen how the three different accompanists treat the thekas differently according to the mood of the song. While the original theka goes like:

known as laggi or laggi- *chanti* was once again a requirement of the form". (Pradhan, 2006) .Laggis often follows some particular styles of unfolding of compositions according to the traditions. As a laggi is generally performed towards the end the accompanist needs to weave and excite a higher flow of adrenaline of the audience. So naturally, these styles are often focused towards building the crescendo of a performance and exciting the audience. As Ashok D A. Ranade, in his book Hindusthani Music, explains laggi playing styles of tabla accompanists and how it excites the audience: "After elaborating the chosen compositions, a singer enters the final phase by doubling the tempo of the taala and inviting the tabla accompanist to employ special compositions known as laggis, which are delicate and sprightly rhythmic patterns woven in order to electrify and arouse the audience, as also to allow the singer some respite." (Ranade, 1997). But analysing the accompaniment of Ustad Sabir Khan and also some parts of Ustad Sheikh Dawood it gets evident that in a performance the playing totally depends on the improvising aspect of a tabla player and he can design and decorate his performance according to his musicality – perfectly proving the application of abstract music in the accompaniment.

## 7. Conclusion

Music is one of those art forms which bring out the best of abstractness from an artiste along with imagination, emotions and creativity. And, just because these qualities can't be seen or touched, doesn't make them any less real. Hindusthani music emerges to be one of the most abstract forms of music as it represents an artiste's imaginations and emotions in its every dimension...and nothing can be more abstract than human imaginary power and emotional context itself.

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