

FORM AND CONTENT IN HINDUSTANI RHYTHM

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The purpose of this article is to discuss the aesthetical problem of form and content in the context of North Indian rhythm. Of the various questions in terms of which this problem is generally dealt with in aesthetics, two seem cardinal :

- a. What are the individual (aesthetic) meanings of 'form' and 'content' ?
- b. How are the two related ?

Other questions—such as those that relate to the primary *and secondary* meanings of "form", the difference of (aesthetic) content from mere material, or to the relative superiority of the one over the other—are but subsidiary; for, they can all be reduced to one of the two we have specified.

An *aesthetical* study of Indian rhythm can, in our view, be very rewarding ; for, as we propose to suggest during the course of this essay, our rhythm is probably man's truest approximation to *some* important aesthetical ideals that are widely accepted today. In contemporary India, no such study has so far been attempted in a sustained and systematic way; and this article is bound to seem unclear at places simply because even the meanings of the basic concepts of Hindustani rhythm, not to speak of their relevance to modern aesthetical theory, have not so far been made an object of explicit enquiry.

Before, however, we turn to Hindustani rhythm, it seems necessary to discuss the two questions generally :

The Meaning of 'Form'

To begin with, what is 'form' ? Our concern, here, should be with the *basic aesthetic* meaning of the word. Such meaning is that which

is, on the one hand, helpful in keeping art distinct from what is not art—say, craft and life's daily activities—and is, on the other hand, applicable not only to all the arts, but to all the various *sub-types of structure* in the region of any one art, such as *doha* and *chaupayi* in Hindi poetry or *quayeda* and *rela* in Hindustani rhythm. Keeping these guiding considerations in mind, we may set out to get at the meaning as follows :—

1. Form is not the mere outline of a work of art. So to regard it would at once be to delimit its applicability to *some* works of art. We may speak of the *outline* of some paintings which mainly present figures and clear shapes. But, a poem can be said to have an outline only in the sense that it is possible to make a list of its main points; which sense, it is plain, relates 'outline' to the poem very differently from the way it may be said to belong to some simple paintings.

2. Nor can 'form' in aesthetics be taken to mean mere shape. The word 'shape', we admit, has some meanings which are freely regarded by aestheticians as being distinctively relevant to all art objects. Thus, it does, not simply mean 'disposition in space', but 'form', or 'apparition'—a word which Susan Langer regards as a fair alternative to 'appearance' in speaking of dance¹—and 'pattern', which we propose to employ in speaking of everything in our rhythm excluding *laya*, *theka* and the accents of rhythm. But, as we use it ordinarily, the word 'shape' stands for something abstractable, that is, for something which remains intelligible even if the specific *content* which has the shape in question is left out. Thus, to borrow (with some change of words) an illustration from Mrs. Langer, our meaning is readily understood when we ask the shopkeeper to show us another lampshade *of the same shape, but in a different colour and size*. In respect of works of art, on the other hand, such talk is plainly impossible. It just does not make sense to say: "Write out another poem of the same shape (or form) but in a different metre, or with a different (though synonymous) set of words." For, the shape or 'form' of a poem, whatever these words be taken to mean, is the shape (or form) of *its* content. Vary its movement or its filling of words, and you change its 'form' at once. In other words, the details of content, here, are not merely put within the poem, but are inseparable from its form.

1. S. K. Langer, 'The Dynamic Image : Some Philosophical Reflections on Dance' included in 'Aesthetics and the Arts', edited by L. A. Jacobus, McGraw Hill Book Co., 1968, p. 78.

3. This leads us to say that the form of a work of art means only the *intimate unity* of *its* contents. Where we speak of art in the abstract, 'form' stands for the idea of organization of content in general; but where our concern is with a particular work of art, 'form' has to be understood as the unique organisation of the specific contents of the work in question. In either case, in the meaning of artistic 'form' a reference to content, as general or specific, is always implicit; and there is no real incongruity between the view of Alexander who regards form (generally) as 'the system of relations in which the parts of the material are unified'¹—rather than 'as mere arrangement in space and time'—and Mrs. Langer's insistence that, as opposed to the shape of (say) a lampshade, the form of *a* work of art is not abstractable :

"We may abstract a shape from an object that has this shape, by disregarding colour, weight and texture, even size; but to the total effect that is an artistic form, the colour matters, the thickness of the line matters."²

4. In thus interpreting it we at once facilitate the realization as to how 'form' is linked with important aesthetic concepts like 'regional quality', 'significant form' and 'aesthetic gratification'. Organization nowhere proceeds through an *even* distribution of emphasis over its contents. It must have an aesthetic centre—such as '*sama*' in rhythm or *vadi svara*' in our classical music, or a dominant figure in painting. This at once makes for some striking regional quality; and, helped by the general cohesiveness of internal organization, it makes the work a 'significant form',—significant in the non-contentious sense of being interesting in itself.³ As for the closeness of 'form'—interpreted as above—to 'aesthetic gratification', it should now be easy to see; for,

"gratification is aesthetic when it is obtained primarily from attention to the formal unity and / or the regional qualities of a complex whole..."⁴

1. Alexander, 'Beauty and Other Forms of Value', p.46.

2. S. K. Langer, 'Problems of Art', pp. 25-26, emphasis ours.

3. This, we believe, is really a safe way to interpret 'significant form'. To translate 'significant' as 'expressive' would be at once to incur many complications of aesthetical theory. On the other hand, it seems unquestionably true to say that 'if the literature of twentieth-century aesthetics and art criticism has favoured any single definition of art, it is that each work of art is an end in itself.' W. H. Bossart, 'Form and Meaning in the Visual Arts', included in 'Aesthetics and the Arts', op. cit., p. 8.

4. M. C. Beardsley, 'The Aesthetic Point of View', published in *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. I, No. 1, January, 1970, p. 46.

5. In understanding 'form' as that which makes a work of art significant *in itself*, we are helped also in keeping art distinct from craft and our daily activities which all draw value from the fact of their being conducive to ends that are, at least in part, *external*.

The Meaning of 'Content'

To turn, now, to the meaning of (artistic) content, one remark seems to issue directly from what we have said about form: content is that which is, or appears to be there (in the work of art) considered not in itself, but *as it is there*—that is, as uniquely organized in, or by that individual work. The *aroha-avaroha* in terms of which we indicate to a beginner the grammatical character of a *raga* is the mere material of music—as distinguished from its subject-matter, say, the theme of a song. It becomes the content of (good) music only when it either appears, by being incorporated within the structure of a *sthayi* or *gat*, as the very orientation of a musical flow towards the *sama* or as the up and down movement of *taans*, in which case it may strike us as the very breath of the freedom with which the latent richness of a melody-type unfolds itself, provided (as is necessary) the organized character of the *raga* being rendered is made repeatedly manifest in the truthful rendering of the *sthayi* or the *gat*.

Form-Content Relation

If a question be put, as has often been done in the history of aesthetics¹ with regard to the comparative importance of form and content—or about the precise relation between them—we would like to answer as follows:

a. The very fact that the question has been posed and discussed implies the possibility of a distinction between form and content.² We have ourselves distinguished the two, if not very explicitly. Content is *what* appears organized, and form means *that* or *how* it is organized *in* a work of art. The distinction can be vivified by comparing 'content' with its existence outside the work, as mere material. To illustrate, sweet and swinging emphases of a *tritāla theka* as played by an expert the

1. Thus, whereas Longinus, Hartmann and Hegel emphasise theme or idea, Plato and Kant prefer the formal excellences of measure and harmony to subject-matter or content.

2. This has to be said because some have categorically denied the propriety of this distinction. Weitz is one of these. He insists that content and form each comprise all that is in the work of art, and that the distinction leads to 'misdirected or specious aesthetic disputes'. To us, however, the distinction in question is not only possible, but necessary.

drummer are obviously quite different from its sixteen *matras* and grammatically fixed accents and sections as seen moveless in a book or as recited in the form of a mere succession of beats and *bols*. And the clearer our awareness of this difference, the greater may be our admiration for the drummer's way of playing; which would naturally heighten our sense of the distinction between what is being played (content) and how it is being played (or form). In the case of an occurrent art, the realization of the difference in question is further facilitated by the fact that the way content is here *being organised*—as distinguished from its merely *appearing organized*, say, in a completed painting—can be actually observed and followed.¹

b. Considered as the artist's way of handling, and as being emblematic of his own creative authority over material which is merely given, form may indeed be ranked higher than content;² for, it is (in a way) the very generator of 'content' as aesthetically understood.

c. But where the question is with regard to the superiority of form or content in a specific work of art, care must be taken to interpret 'form' not as the artist's way of handling or style generally, but as *manifest in the work in question*.

d. While discussing the problem of form-content relation, two points of view should indeed be always borne in mind. *Within the work of art*, form and content are required to be held so intimately as one that they may appear almost indistinguishable; for the distinctive idiom of art is non-discursive, and its aim is to create a complex whole that is internally very intense, and so interesting in itself. *For purposes of understanding* however, form must always be distinguished from content.³ Otherwise, in addition to other difficulties, it would be impossible for us to admire the drummer for his magical ability to produce by his handling, such a wealth of beauty out of the very scanty material of some beats interjected into ideally apprehended motion.

1. Say, when the drummer is doing what is called 'bol banana', or when he employs a shapely, self-evolving access to the sama.

2. Cf. : ".....In proportion as poetry becomes more intense the content is *entirely remade by form* and has no separate value at all." (emphasis ours), Roger Fry on Poetry. Quoted by Sparshott in his 'The Structure of Aesthetics', Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 348-49.

3. Cf. : "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is impossible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it." Walter Pater, quoted by Sparshott in : 'The Structure of Aesthetics', op. cit., p. 349.

e. But then, in *thinking* of form *and* matter, do we necessarily, and on the whole, run counter to the indivisible unity of a great work of art? No, we do not; for, in the very act of trying to distinguish the nature of the one we refer to the other. To think of form *and* content *in the way we have done*, is thus only to realize *understandingly* the extreme closeness of form and content in a good work of art.

Why music is often ranked higher than other arts should now be clear. Here, probably more than anywhere else, we find it very difficult to distinguish content from form. It is, in our view, easy to explain how.

"In music we have no *permanent* means of deciding which of the many aspects we shall call the subject and which the treatment."¹

The difficulty may be manifest even in our concern with a single note. As one of those *svaras* that merely make up a musical phrase, it is a detail of content; but as that at which an ascending melodic movement culminates, or as the *vadi svara* to which the other notes seem generally conducive, the note in question also seems to organize or 'form' what, as compared to it would appear mere content.

Our task, now, is to deal with Hindustani rhythm; and to this we turn presently.

Form in Hindustani Rhythm

'Form' in Hindustani Rhythm may be said to stand for the idea that a definite number of beats, aided by specific 'bols', some emphases and the 'sama' whether marked or merely suggested—is seen (being) organized either directly into a cycle, or in general or at least eventual conformity with the specific character and extent of a cycle.

The individual ideas implicit in this definition may now be explained, so as to clarify what form really is in the region of Hindustani rhythm :

(1) Leaving out mere *laya*², the durational aspect of our music may be said to have two main forms : cycle and pattern. The word

1. D. F. Tovey's article, 'Handel as Composer', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, eleventh edition, Vol. XII (1910), p. 913. Emphasis ours.

2. Elsewhere, I have defined *laya* as "musical duration which is controlled—but not rigidly determined or mathematically measured—in respect of its speed; and which permits such a variety of pace, emphasis and expressiveness that it seems utterly removed from what we commonly mean by time." I may add that in *alapa* *laya* is regulated (in the main) subjectively; and in rhythm or *tala*, to a great extent objectively.

'form', as aesthetically understood, is equally applicable to both. It is to provide for this common application that, in our definition, we speak of *two kinds of organization* of beats and *bols*: (a) 'either directly into a cycle'; or (b) 'in general or at least eventual conformity with the specific character and extent of a cycle'.

(2) Yet, care should be taken to realize the difference between the form of a cycle and that of a *premeditated* rhythmic pattern. Both are of course, in principle, internally organized; and are therefore 'form' in the basic aesthetic sense of the word. But, whereas the form of a properly played cycle directly appears self-complete or self-fulfilling—in so far as the *sama* is here always duly touched by way of completing a round—the organization of a pattern appears completed only when it actually attains or at least suggests, as in the case of *ateet* and *anagat* patterns, the first or focal beat *of the cycle*. The form of a pattern may therefore be said to be subsidiary. It becomes fully manifest only when it gains access to the *sama of the theka*. What is more, its entire manner of movement has, in general, to conform to the distinctive idiom of the cycle.

(3) Where the patterns are *improvised*, as in the case of extempore *sangat* which the drummer may be called upon to provide to (say) the *sitarist*, their form is (in principle) judged—till before they reach the *sama*—mainly by marking not only their correspondence, in respect of manner of movement and temporal extent, with the work of the main performer, which itself is required to be properly structured, but also how they run parallel to, abstract or deviate wilfully from, and yet hasten back to the full, basic flow of the *theka*.¹ The awareness of total form, in such cases, depends as much on the listener's exercise of trained attention as on the objective propriety of the playing itself. And, though some *bols* are naturally always employed, the drummer is *here* guided more by his attentive observation of the rhythmic manner and extent of what the main performer does—and, what is more, throughout, if but subconsciously, by his hold over the basic form of the *tala*—than by any conscious thought as to what *bols* are to be employed. In other words, *predetermined bols*, beats and emphases are *not always equally essential* for the form of a rhythmic pattern.

(4) Where a pattern organises itself in such a way that it both evinces its own inner design and yet deviates from the normal flow of

1. This is necessary. So, our definition speaks of the need for at least 'eventual conformity with the specific extent of a cycle'.

the cycle, the right aesthetic response on the part of the listener is both rich and difficult. It is the awareness of a form (here, of the *theka*) as sustaining, and as itself being embellished by another distinct form (or the pattern), each perceived in its own distinctive character, and yet in relation to the other; so that the total experience, though rich and aesthetically very satisfying, is by no means blurred, but is rather a harmony of two distinct forms.

Here, however, what is experienced as a flow is only the pattern. The form of the cycle persists only as a felt, steady background. Thus, it is clear that, *as employed in our music, the form of rhythm is not always experienced as being 'occurent' or flowing though some actual process is always there.*¹

(5) Yet, the suggestion of flow is a very important feature of the form of rhythm; and it can inform a pattern even as a partial, yet palpable passage of efflorescence. Thus, when a well designed integration of *bols* is being played by the drummer—while the *Sarangi* simply goes on marking the speed and extent of the chosen cycle—it often happens that from a particular point within its fabric the pattern gathers and activates itself perceptibly, and tends towards—and finally blooms forth at—the *sama* in a manner which makes it seem distinct not only from the *theka*, but from its own earlier parts. The reference, here, is to what is technically called *aamad*. In our view, it can play as important a part in the form of rhythm as a dominant movement or line of look can in the organization of a painting.

(6) The feature just referred to can, however, characterize the form only of a rhythmic pattern, not of a rhythmic-cycle. The flow, as formed in a cycle, is required to be, on the whole, even and steady. A pattern is subject to no such necessity. Nor does the form of a cycle really permit that close and intense filling of *bols* which constitutes the essence of charm in the case of quite a few rhythmic *patterns*.

(7) There are some other features or effects too which can characterize the form only of a pattern, never that of a cycle as such. The two most obvious of these are *ebullient* self-assertiveness, as in the case of pattern called *ateet*, and a suggestion of organized self-restraint as illustrated by patterns of the *anagat* variety. The latter can be win-

1. On the other hand, as pointed out by Mrs. Langer, a shape that is static may well suggest a dynamic form. Thus, a look at the dry river-bed may give us an idea as to how the waters once flowed.

some like a dainty, blushing withdrawal, provided the playing is both soft and duly accentuated.

The reason of this difference may be brought out thus. It is of course true that neither a cycle nor a pattern can have a form without employing a specific number of *matras*, *bols* and some emphases. But, whereas the *sama* and other emphases as implicit in the *bols* of a *pattern* may be shifted—of course, systematically, and with an eye on heightening the beauty of its form—the same cannot be done in the case of a cycle without damaging its essential nature. If the *bols* of the *theka* are displaced from their corresponding *matras*, its character as an unchangeable support—which is one essential meaning of the word '*theka*'—at once disappears, and what we get instead is only a *variation* of the cycle. In the case of playing a *tukra*, on the other hand, it is commonly regarded as a mark of skill if, in a spirit of guarded abandon, the drummer shortens or withholds one *bol* or elongates or displaces another—as compared to their set speed and location¹—without of course failing to return to the *sama* immaculately, either in terms of an audible stroke on the drum or as a mere suggestion.

Whether actually played or merely suggested, the completion of a *theka* must always be made to appear *at* the set *matra*. In the case of some patterns, on the other hand, the last audible *bol* may occur a little *before or after* the fixed location of the *sama*. The latter, in such cases, is suggested and affirmed through the very intentional and designed quality of the way in which the playing avoids it.²

(8) This, incidentally, prompts us to explain why, in the definition, we describe the form of rhythm as *bols*, emphases etc. that are (sometimes) seen as *being* organized. If a cycle or a simple and evenly flowing pattern is played out in the set way, the playing just appears organized. But, where the drummer is shuffling the *bols* voluntarily, beautifully, and without losing sight of the *sama*, we get the extra suggestion that the pattern is *being actively* organised.

Our treatment of 'form' may now be allowed to end. We have, of course, not said any thing about the details of the way in which

1. This is called *bol banana*.

2. Cf. "Form does not lie simply in the correct observance of rules. It lies in the struggle of certain living material to achieve itself within a pattern. The very refusal of a poet to sacrifice what he means to be a perfectly correct rhyme, for example, can more powerfully suggest the rhyme than correctness itself would."

Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, Hamilton, London pp. 313-14.

rhythmic organization actually takes place¹; but, interesting though it certainly is, the matter left out is hardly demanded by our present purpose which is simply to determine the general meaning of 'form' and 'content' in the context of our rhythm.

Content in Hindustani Rhythm

Here, too, we may begin by proposing a definition :

Whatever appears (or is imagined) as organized in a rhythm-cycle or a rhythmic pattern—either directly or in terms of a felt reference—at the particular speed at which it is played, may be regarded as the content of rhythm.

To facilitate understanding, this definition may be broken up and explained piecemeal as follows :—

(a) Considered in themselves, the beats, *bols* and the various emphases are only the raw material of rhythm. It is only when they appear organized as a cycle or pattern that they can be said to form the 'content' of rhythm.

We here think it necessary to point out how, by virtue of its inclusion of *bols* as a part of its content, rhythm seems quite different from, and in a way superior to the other arts :

Seeking to justify Schopenhauer's remark that all arts aspire to the conditions of music, Herbert Read points out that

".....almost *in music alone*, it is possible for the artist to appeal to his audience directly, *without the intervention of a medium of communication in common use for other purpose*. The architect must express himself in buildings which have some utilitarian purpose. The poet must use words which are bandied about in the daily give-and-take of conversation....."²

Now if, as here, an art is regarded important only if its medium of communication is *not* in common use 'for other purposes', rhythm as such should, in our view, be ranked higher than music ; for, whereas musical notes are in fact sweetly employed (say) by quite a few hawkers

1. Generally, this is done in accordance with the Gestalt Laws of perception, the most important of them, in our rhythm, being the laws of 'figure and ground' and 'common destiny'.

2. Herbert Read, 'A Definition of Art', included in 'Aesthetics and the Arts', op. cit., p. 4. Emphases ours.

in their characteristic cries, or by some bells to chime a particular hour pleasantly—purposes which are both clearly utilitarian—the *mnemonic syllables or bols of rhythm are never employed for any non-aesthetic purpose.*

(b) In the case of a cycle, where it is not marked by beats and *bols*, *laya*—as the unbroken evenness of flow—is throughout supplied by the listener's (or at least the drummer's own) imagination. The beats only enable us to mark and diversify, and to hold onto the flow of *laya*. The cycle itself seems an unbroken unity only because *laya* is found or imagined as permeating it. So, *laya or musical duration too must be regarded as a vital part of the content of rhythm.* Here, however, it does occur as it does in *alapa*,¹ but is organized as a cycle of evenly marked accents. It should now be clear that our response even to the basic manifestations of rhythm is by no means merely sensuous.

(c) The content of a rhythmic *pattern* must be said to include, besides its own *bols*, one additional factor,—that is, *a felt reference to the basic rhythm-cycle* on which it is based, and to which it has eventually to conform, however devious it may appear during the course of its unfoldment. Unless the flow of the *theke* is continually remembered by the drummer, the pattern is always liable to falter; and unless the listener throughout remains mindful of the flow in question, he cannot hope to see the precise way in which the pattern moves.² So, the insensuous element of the content of rhythm consists not only in the ideal attitude of remaining steady in marking or following the *matras*, but in a comparative activity of the mind which judges not only the general and/or ultimate conformity of the pattern with the cycle, but the creative audacity of the former in deviating for some time from the latter.

(d) Nor can we leave out from the meaning of its 'content' *the precise speed* at which the cycle or pattern is being played; for, speed is obviously an inalienable element of drumming. What is more, it is not merely included along with, but determines the other contents of rhythm. Thus, at the quicker stages of playing, one or two *bols*—such as are meant, in the main, for slower drumming—may have either to be played differently than they ordinarily are, or even replaced with other syllables. Such changes are demanded by the need to keep the

1. We do not speak of the form and content of *laya* in *alapa*, for *laya* as such is not a work of art.

2. And of course his perception of the form of pattern too will suffer at once; for, where form is occurrent, the manner of movement must also be attended to.

playing internally distinct, and from the outside seemingly whole, even in its more fluent movement. Taken by itself, however, speed is a mere element of rhythm ; it becomes the content of the latter only when it actively contributes to, and is itself incorporated within, the specific inner character of the cycle or pattern. A drummer who sacrifices clarity of *bols* for the sake of sheer speed obviously fails to organize a vital element of the content of rhythm.

But, it may be wondered, is its speed really indispensable as 'content' for a 'form' of rhythm ? Does speed really *determine* the *specific* character of rhythmic forms ? Now, one may feel tempted to answer these questions negatively, in view of the commonly held belief that the *same* pattern can be recited or played at *different* speeds ; the implication obviously being that the 'form' or design of the pattern will remain the same even when its speed is changed. It is, however, easy to see how such suggestions are really quite fallacious :

The matter may be considered, either abstractly or with an eye on fact. Abstractly speaking, the form of rhythm *means* the form of a flow, even as the 'form' of painting stands for the idea of there being something visual.¹ So, it would be as improper to leave out the idea of speed from the meaning of rhythmic form as to ignore the suggestion of speciality in describing what the 'form' of painting is. And if we decide to reckon with rhythm as played, speed would seem vital in two clear ways. Where the object of attention is a steady *madya laya theka* that *has been* played for quite some time, our awareness of speed may well be subconscious ; but it is nonetheless there. How otherwise could we explain the fact that here the slightest deviation from steadiness of flow disturbs us at once ? If, on the other hand, we see the *theke* (or pattern) as actually *changing* its speed, its form too will appear as growing more compact and fluent. So, speed is in either case integral to 'form'. The pattern or *theke* that is said to remain the same in spite of the change in its pace is but the idea of an abstract design, not 'form' considered as the concrete and dynamic integration of its elements.

(e) In the simple execution of a *theke* the drummer occasionally employs some flourishes too—which are not a part of the normal, prefixed structure of the cycle—simply for the sake of making the playing seem beautiful, by relieving the monotony of its set manner of rendering. Thus, where a slow, expansive cycle like *dhamar* is being played,

1. To say this, however, is obviously not to exhaust the meaning of 'form' in painting,

the drummer may deftly elongate the effect of every *bol* by suffixing its impact with a gentle rub of the skin of the *tabla*; and this partly with a view to keeping his own counting steady, and partly by way of audibly indicating to the vocalist the flow of *laya* even *between* the *matras*. Such flourishes are not regular patterns. Yet, in so far as they contribute to the continuity and richness of actual drumming, they must be regarded as a part of the content of rhythm.

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As suggested throughout by our examination of their individual natures, form and content are closely inter-related in respect of both fact and idea. They are neither found nor can be understood in isolation from each other. The following additional remarks should make the matter clearer :

(a) The form or the unitary and organised character of rhythm depends vitally upon the evenness of flow or *laya* which it articulates. In respect of its actual speed, *laya* in turn depends upon, and is regulated by the temporal quality of the way in which the very first *bol* or tuft of *bols* is played.¹ This *bol* is obviously a detail of content. The interdependence of form and content is hence clear.

(b) Form, in the case of rhythm, means not only that the *bols* of the cycle are as held as one, but that they are kept quite articulate. This, in turn, prohibits acceleration of speed beyond a certain limit; and speed, as already brought out, is an important element of the content of rhythm. The same truth may be differently realized by reflecting that the proper *organization* of pattern like *relas* and *raus* demands *quick* playing. Generally speaking, in conformity with the requirement of proper form, the content of a rhythm-cycle is to be played neither so slowly that it may become impossible to apprehend *laya* as one unified flow—instead of a mere succession of detached, static units—nor so quickly that the clarity of *bols* may suffer. If *they* grow indistinct, the content of rhythm is only disfigured, not organized.

(c) The experienced form of rhythm depends on one's ability to imagine the flow of *laya* throughout its extent, marked or unmarked. Now, when—as an attempt to bring out the aesthetic importance of the

1. To illustrate, if the syllable—which marks the *sama* of *dhamar*—is spoken very briefly (or quickly) as a dainty dot,—say, as ढ—the following too will have to be spoken at a quick pace. Alternatively, if the *sama* is uttered as an elongated and leisurely ढ, the speed of the following *bols* will have to be slowed down correspondingly.

unmarked parts of the *theka*, or as intentional demand on our ability to flow the course of rhythm—the drummer wants us to make a special effort to imagine the flow towards the *sama*, the point where he wants us to begin has to be marked on the drum quite emphatically. In other words, the requirement as to the proper observation of *laya*, which is so essential for responding rightly to the form of rhythm, may determine the precise euphonic character of individual *bols*.

(d) If, as is only proper, rhythmic form be regarded as an *integration* of *distinct* accents, its role in determining the content of *bols*, should indeed, be easy to realize. It is form that requires that only such syllables be put alongside of one another as can actually be played fluently without undue strain on the hands ; that *bols* be mellow without being indistinct, and clear without being obtrusive ; or that they be neither so broad or sharp as to disturb the unity of flow nor so weak as to themselves become indistinct. The *sama*, of course, is expected to be a little more distinct than the other *bols* ; but if it is too sharp and sudden it may make it difficult for us, for quite a few moments, to regain access to the basic flow. Further, the requirement of rhythmic form also demands that the *bols* should not only be correctly timed, but seem sweet to the ear. This will enable the playing to invite attention to their location, thereby making it easier for the listener to follow the flow of *laya* without which neither a cycle nor a pattern can appear organized. It is indeed a fact that a drummer whose playing is neat and sweet also appears absorbed in the flow of *laya*. We may here be allowed to repeat that, though certainly occurrent, the form of rhythm is not throughout audible; and that some ideal involvement is necessarily implicit in our simplest awareness of the form of rhythm.

Above all, in the region of our rhythm, the distinction between form and content can be as hard to draw as, by an accepted ideal of art, it is (we have seen) required to be. Thus, such '*bols*' as *dir, dir*, if fluently played, directly make for continuity; and so it would be as proper to call them a part of form as a detail of content. Again, the *suns-or* the effect of a deep, breathing continuity—which is worked up by a proper employment of 'the left one'—is not a mere content, but a connecting link. Finally, the *sama* does not only occur as a beat, but completes a round directly ; and to call it content only would be merely to ignore what the *sama* always *does*.

A final doubt must be cleared to ensure adequacy of treatment. In discussing its aesthetic form and content, we have all along assumed

that Hindustani rhythm is an art. But is the assumption justified? Now, we have no doubt it is. We deem it quite possible to argue at length that rhythm is both unique and important as an art. But, in so far as the point is here subsidiary, only the following may be said about :—

1. If properly played, any *theka* or pattern can appear thing of intrinsic charm ; and, as for a full-length exposition of rhythm, it can be so absorbing that it may induce in knowledgeable listeners a state of total self-forgetfulness, and attune them in *tadatmya* with the winged, variform beauty of rhythm.

2. Again, our rhythm seems very true to the ideal of 'pure' art. The *bols*, we have seen, are used only in rhythm. What is more, they do not refer to anything external. A good solo *tabla* recital charms us mainly with the excellence of its inner organization, though the euphonic quality of playing also counts. Of course, if he so decides, the drummer can produce *bols* that resemble everyday sounds and familiar happenings, such as the movement and noise of a train as it steams out, gathers speed and comes to a halt ; but whenever this is attempted, those who truly *know* rhythm only feel amused.

3. Finally, rhythm may be said to be a distinct art in view of the fact that in perhaps no other art is the precise point or region of organization, or the dominant motif or movement, so clearly identifiable as in the region of rhythm. Our reference, here, is obviously to *sama* and to the shapely *aamads* that make it seem unmistakable.