

# LAYA AND TALA IN THE FOLK MUSIC OF UTTAR PRADESH

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In folk-music we find the combination of words (*shabda*) and notes (*swaran*) blended together in a harmonious whole. It is a suitable topic of research for scholars and exponents of Indian classical music, to discover the exact relationship between classical and folk music and whether the former is founded on folk-music or the latter is dependent on the former. It may be firmly stated that folk-music has played a major role in the evolution of Indian classical music. One may find some tunes which are common to both folk and classical music.

In folk-music, though we do not find a systematic and elaborate description of various *rāgas* and *raginis*, yet we can discern some fine tunes which are sung by classical musicians also. The tunes which are commonly found in folk-songs are *Kaharava*, *Khemata* and *Jat*.

The elements of *laya* and *tala* play a significant role in many folk songs. Folk music is almost lifeless without the *laya* and *tala*. The rhythm is so inter-woven with the fabric of the music that the folk-singer, unaware of the metrical system of the *tala* often presents the song correctly by the knowledge of its rhythm which he acquires by constant listening and singing of the actual song. *Tala* or rhythm, therefore is an important factor in folk-music.

Various *talas* of classical music have been successfully adopted by the folk-musician. We find that it is comparatively easier to recognise a *tala* in a folk-song than to trace the elements of a particular *raga* in that song.

The *Kaharava*, the *Jat*, the *Dadara*, the *Khemata*, the *Dipchandi* etc., are some of the popular *talas* used in these songs. Even out of these, the *Kaharava* seems to be the most common *tala* being used in almost eighty per cent of these oral songs. The *tala* is composed of four *matras*. The intricacy and beauty of this rhythmic pattern can only be understood when we listen to the *Kajari* and *Jhumar* folk songs accompanied by musical instruments such as *Dholak* and *Majira*. The *Sorathi*, *Birha*, *Sohani*, *Purbi* and *Nirguna* are some of the other popular folk songs which are sung in the *Kaharva tala*. The texture of *Kaharava* changes according to the speed and expression of the song. Sometimes it is sung in the *Druta laya* and at other times in the *Vilambit Laya*.

*Dipchandi* is another popular *tala* in which the rhythm of the folk songs is unconsciously adjusted to the natural and normal flow of our respiratory system. The rhythm changes according to the change in tone. The *Dipchandi tala* is composed of seven *matras*. The popular song *Bidesiya* is sung in this particular *tala*.

Sometimes a song is sung in two different *talas* that reflect artistic devices on the part of the singer, although he may not be conscious of them. For example, the *Jhumar* song may be taken here which is sung both in *Dadara* and the *Kaharava talas*. The *Bidesiya* song, which has already been referred to, is also sung both in the *Dipchandi* and the *Jat talas*. The *Jat* is a popular *tala* consisting of fourteen *matras*. The *Sohar*, *Gavana*, *Phagua* or *Holi* are some of the important songs which are sung in this *tala*. Thus, the *tala* or the rhythm, as such, plays an important role in the composition of folk songs. If one tries to analyse the impact of classical music on folk songs, the knowledge of *tala* therefore, will be a great help.

In folk-music only four *Thats* (modes) are generally used. In *Purvi* folksongs, which are mostly sung in the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh one can find the *Vilaval That*. The following example may be quoted,

*Jeth Baisakhava Ke Talafi Re Bhubhuriya*

*Ho Mahendar Misir,*

*Chalat men Godava Mora Piray*

*Ho Mahendar Misir.*

*Chaita* is a seasonal folk song which is sung in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April). It is noted for its melodious music and exceeding sweetness. It is essentially a solo song, though, often sung as a chorus. The rural singers are divided into two groups, each facing the other. The members of the first group sing the first line of a *Chaita* song, then the members of the second group sing the second line in a chorus. Thus, the

song proceeds and reaches the climax when the members of both the groups sing it, at the top of their voices. In *Chaita* songs the *Khamaja* that is generally used which may be found in the following lines,

*“Manik Hamaro Herayile Ho Rama Jamuna men,  
Yehi Re Jamunava Ke Chikati Matiya,  
Chalat Pair Bichhilaile Ho Rama Jamuna men.”*

The *vrat* (fast) of *Shasti Mata* is celebrated in the bright half of the month of Kartika. As it is observed on the sixth day of the month, so, it is termed “*Chhathi Mātā*”. Really speaking, it is a fast devoted to the Sun-God and is observed by young women who are childless. They worship the sun in the early morning and offer him oblations of milk and water with sweets and fruits. They sing with their sweet voice the song in which *Kafi* that is mainly used. For example :

*Ganga ji ke Tire Tire Boalon main Rai,  
Raja ji ke Miriga chariye chari Jai,  
Ye chhathi Mata Karabi sevakai.*

The *that* known as ‘*Bhairava*’ has been used in a very popular folk-song in which a young girl expresses the sorrow and pangs of her heart when she is married to an unworthy person.

*Sabha Ke Ta Dela Bhola An Dhan Sonava,  
Banavari Ho, Hamara Ke Larika Bhatar.*

While singing folk songs, the rules of high and low pitch (*laghu* and *guru*) are not rigorously observed. The singers change the long vowels into short ones and *vice versa*, in order to suit their own convenience. As there are no hard and fast rules for the observation of high or low pitch, so the folk singers adjust their voice accordingly. In order to give a musical tune to the song, the folk musician sometimes, pronounces the short syllable as a long one. As there may not occur a musical break in the songs it is considered necessary to make certain changes.

*Birha* is the song of Ahirs—the cowherd community—which is very important in Uttar Pradesh. The Ahirs belong to a race of sturdy people who tend cows and take to agriculture. They sing a song which is known as *Birha*. While singing it, at the top of their voice, they always lengthen the penultimate vowel (*upantya swar*) and shorten the last one. For examples,

*Pisana Ke Parikal Musariya Tusariya  
Dudhava Ke Parikal Bila.....r  
Āpan Āpan Jobana Sanbhorihē Re Bituiya  
Rahari Me Lagala Ba Huda.....r.*

Here we find that the last but one syllable (*matra*) 'la' in the second line and 'da' in the fourth line have been very much lengthened while the last ones have been shortened. Even if the last *matra* is a long one, it is shortened to suit the convenience of the singer.

I wish to draw attention to a most important factor of folk-music which is known as *Stobha* i.e., insertion. These insertions are of four types :

The syllable insertion (*Matra Stobha*)

The letter insertion (*Varna Stobha*)

The word insertion (*Shabda Stobha*)

The sentence insertion (*Vakya Stobha*)

Folk singers while singing a certain song, insert some syllables (*matras*) here and there in order to suit their convenience. For example,

*Machiya Baithal E Sunahu Bachaniya*

*Raur Beta Morang Chalale, Kavana Ram Avaguniya.*

Here the original word is *Kavan* (who). But in order to make it more convenient for singing, the musician has added the syllable 'a' in the last letter 'n' making it *Kavana*. In some songs, we find some letters inserted from outside the body of the lyric. One can multiply such instances in any number, but only one example is sufficient,

*Bav Bahele Puravaiya Alasi Niniya Aile Ho*

*Ninia Bhaile Bairiniya, Piya Phiri Gaile Ho.*

Here the suffix 'ia' has been added to the word *Nind* (sleep) and *Bairin* (enemy) in order to make them musical. The third kind of insertion—the word—is found mainly in *Chaita* and *Bhajan* or devotional songs. For example :

*Aho Rāma, Satal Rahanin Piya Sange*

*Sejiya Ho Rama*

*Bate Bate, Lagi Gaile Piyava Se Reriya*

*Ho Rama, Bate Bate.*

Here the words "Aho Rāmā" have been added in the beginning and "Ho Rāmā" in the end of each couplet. The last category of songs are those where one whole line has been inserted in the middle of the song. More specially in *Nirgun* songs we find such insertions.

#### *Folk-Musical Instruments*

Folk musical instruments are closely connected with folk music. Without the accompaniment of these instruments, folk music becomes dull and at times even lifeless. It is a noteworthy feature that many of these

folk instruments are hardly used in classical music. Some of these instruments are the *Dholak*, *Majira*, *Jhanjha*, *Kartal*, *Huduka*, *Dafa*, *Changa*, *Pipihiri*, and *Vanshi* (flute).

Out of these folk instruments, the *Dholak* is the most popular. Folk singers who are expert in their art can also produce various *talas* of classical music on the *Dholak* and at times they may even surpass the professional *Tabala* players in this respect. This instrument is used by men while singing *Holi*, *Chaita*, *Alha* and other folk songs. The women-folk employ it when singing *Sohar* songs on the auspicious occasion of the birth of a son. Even in the Punjab the *Dholak* is very popular and is used on all occasions of social and festive significance. It enjoys a special popularity with women who just cannot resist the temptation of the rhythm of its beat. Innumerable memories are associated with its sound, because all gaiety and celebrations of the family include the *Dholak* as the basic and essential instrument. When the little girls play at house-keeping and celebrate marriages of their dolls, they give a very realistic picture of the importance of the occasion by bringing in a real *Dholak*. Whenever, in fact, men and women get together and sing folk-songs, *Dholak* comes in very handy<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, when a *Dholak* is not available in the village, people improvise one out of an earthen pitcher which they play upside-down and strike with a small stone to keep the beat. At times a big wooden pot—*Kathauta*—is turned down and sticks are rubbed on it to produce the sound of a *Dholak*.

The *Sarangi* is another instrument which is widely used by wandering mendicants known as *Jogis* or *Sanyis*. While playing on this instrument, they sing devotional songs and the ballads of Gopichand and Bharathari and thus they make a living for themselves. *Jhal* or *Jhanjh* is employed while singing seasonal songs like *Holi* and *Chaita*. The *Sādhus* play on *Kartal* when they sing devotional songs. The *Changa* is used by Kauvali singers. Sometimes, the rural youth plays on the flute and produce sweet notes. The snake-charmer (*Sapera*) uses the *Beena* to charm the serpent while he conducts his performance. *Dafara*—a round tambourine-like musical instrument—is employed by the villagers in the worship of goddess Kālī or Durgā. *Dhuttuka* is a special kind of folk-instrument (horn) which is specially used on the occasion of marriage. It is also called *Singa* because it resembles the shape of a *Singa* or the horn of a cow. Thus, there are several folk-musical instruments which are used on various festive occasions.

Folk-music is fast disappearing from the country-side due to the increasing impact of urban modes of living on the rural life of the villages.

1. S.S. Bedi—Folklore of the Punjab page, 105.

The fast growing industrial development and new means of entertainment like the cinema are also making considerable changes in the styles of folk-singing. The folk songs which are relayed from various A.I.R. stations of Uttar Pradesh do not represent the real folk-tunes, on the other hand, they are infiltrated with popular cinema tunes. This change of attitude and life in general, has made the task of recording and collecting authentic folk-music a bit difficult. It is high time that this precious heritage should be collected and preserved as soon as possible. Otherwise, there is danger of this source of our past tradition and cultural inheritance being soon dried up.

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