

About Raga Music
& Dhrupad, Khayal & Tumri

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As the goal of FASIS is fundamentally about education, this article serves to provide an abbreviated background to raga music leading to description about Dhrupad, Khayal and Tumri with an explicit focus on requesting your presence at attending the concert and the lecture demonstration on June 3rd 2006. Lecture tickets are very limited in number. This is a special opportunity to meet with the artists.

Tickets are available at Grass Roots Bookstore in Corvallis and at Devi Indian Grocers, in Corvallis, Oregon.

Hindustani Name	Solfa	Scale of C	Ratio to Sa
Shadja (Sa)	Doh	C	1
Komal Rishabh(Re)		C#, Db	256/243
Shuddha Rishabh(Re)	Re	D	9/8
Komal Gandhar(Ga)		D#, Eb	32/27
Shuddha Gandhar(Ga)	Mi	E	5/4
Shuddha Madhyam(Ma)	Fa	F	4/3
Tivra Madhyam(Ma)		F#	45/32
Pancham(Pa)	Sol	G	3/2
Komal Dhaivat(Dha)		G#, Ab	128/81
Shuddha Dhaivat(Dha)	La	A	5/3
Komal Nishad (Ni)		A#, Bb	16/9
Shuddha Nishad (Ni)	Ti	B	15/8
Shadja (S a)	Doh	C ¹	2

In raga music there are several characteristics that define the raga. These include the arrangement of notes in the ascension and descension also known as arohana and avarohana, the context and the manner in which the notes are used, the stress on some notes – known as vadi and samavadi, intonation of individual notes (shruti-s).

Broadly Indian music can be categorized into anibaddha (open) and nibaddha (closed) forms.

Anibaddha form has no rhythmic accompaniments or well-defined parts. This should remind some of us of the “alap” form in concerts and the alap is an example of an open form.

The nibaddha form or closed form refers to music scores with a fixed rhythm pattern that has a beginning and an end – set to a “tal”. Tal refers to rhythm.

Arising out of many diverse influences – Vedas, Persian cultural influences and artists innovations, there are three important forms of Hindustani Classical Music:

the dhrupad

the khayal

and the thumri styles.

The dhrupad is the strictest of these three “in terms of raga grammar and presentation format, the kayal permits more liberty and the thumri is the most flexible in this regard compared to the other two”, according to Sandeep Bagchee in his work “NAD, Understanding Raga Music”.

Dhrupad is considered to be indisputably one of the oldest forms of vocal musical tradition in Hindustani raga music. The performance consists of 2 musical structures : alap and bandish.

Dhrupad as it evolved in the royal courts was called *darbari dhrupad* and that is the style that is presently performed in concerts and it is the only style I have heard in recordings and performances. Literature speaks of another form called *haveli dhrupad* which is performed in temples but is not one that is in concert form and I have not experience this form and hence it is not introduced in this article on dhrupad form.

Dhrupad is said to have descended from a form called prabandha and is said to have been adapted in the fifteenth century to the *darbari dhrupad* form we presently have. The court of the Raja (king) Man Singh Tomar and later Mughal courts patronized this form of Dhrupad.

The main forms of Dhrupad heard today are said to be of the form Dagar-vani (in the style of the voice of the Dagar family), Pandit Vidur Mallik’s Dharbanga Gharana and that of Bishnupur gharana.

Dhrupad is performed solo by a vocalist with an occasional accompaniment on the *vina* or the *violin* as more recent developments and the tal is voiced by the instrument – *pakhawaj*.

Structure of a Dhrupad performance

Introductory alap, followed by a fixed composition (called the dhrupad also to be – just a bit confusing).

We will consider each of the above two components that form the musical elements of a Dhrupad concert.

The alap

The alap itself is common and well defined structural element of classical music from the Indian sub-continent. It has three elements to it: vilambit, Madhya and drut stages. Sometimes, the pakhawaj player indicates these stages of the alap with a stroke of his/her drum.

Alap is free and floating exploration of the raga. It is free and floating but not lacking in temporal structure. There is what is considered as the essence of alap – the “laya” that is an inherent articulation of time using the pitch, the timbre and the volume.

The singer employs syllables to aid in delineation of the raga in the first stage of the alap called the vilambit. These may commonly be syllables such as na, ne, ri, re, di, de and so on. These are collectively called nom-tom. The Madhya alap is melodically different as the location is central in the time frame of the alap and the octave generally higher. Melodic pattern is more evident. The artist also uses musical devices such as syncopes and rubato to hide pulsatory interjections and maintain melody. There is a general increase in the pulsation which often draws in the listener. This is the boundary exploration period. It defines the boundaries of the raga that is being rendered for the particular dhrupad piece. The tempo of a dhrupad alap changes often. It starts slow and then often increases in multiples such as dugun(twice), tigun(thrice) etc. or even in fractionals. So compression and interpolation using the syllables of the nom-tom are part of the alap rendering. The nom-tom alap or drut is of much greater rhythmic density and has gamak-s and mohra. Explaining gamak-s and mohra is beyond the scope of this article. The drut portion is lively with a high contrast interplay between slow gamak-s and fast notes of the nom-tom. It's conclusion with the slow candence marked mohra leads to the fixed composition element of dhrupad.

Fixed Composition - dhrupad

This is a metered composition and the pakhawaj player joins in with the thapiya – fixed rhythm in relation to the text and the melody of the composition.

There are two musical structures that are distinct in the fixed composition. These are the base or sthayi and the antara or the end. Clearly, this indicates the existence of more. Indeed, in the past Dhrupad had more components in the fixed composition, However, the concert form heard on most discographies and live renderings is as described herein. The sthayi is sung first and once the improvisation is complete, the artist will then continue to render the antara and improvise on the melody. Once the antara is complete, a interesting transition is made back to the first sentence of the text of the sthayi. There is a improvisation that is distinct – bol(words) –banth (division) it is called – as it is words that are synchronized with beats and cross-rythms often reminding me of structures in Jazz.

For example, a text of a dhrupad sthayi: (taken from NAD – An understanding of RAGA music)

Sthayi Text:

Manushya ho to wohi, Rasakhani

[A man is one who, says Rasakhani (the composer)]

Baso Braj Gokula gava ke gwalan;
[Resides in Brajbhumi (the birthplace of Lord Krishna among the cow-herds of Gokul village)]

Antara Text:

Jo pasu ho to kahan base mero;

[where should an animal stay]

Charu nita Nanda ki dhenu majharan.

[But graze daily among Nand's (Lord Krishna's father cows)]

We hope you have learned some to further your enjoyment of live or recorded dhrupad listening experiences.

Thanks to V.V. Krishna Rao, Sandeep Bagchee, author of NAD – Understanding Raga Music for their contributions.