

## STUDY OF SIX BEAT RHYTHMIC VARIATIONS USED IN GURBANI KIRTAN

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### Abstract

Gurbani kirtan is devotional singing style of Sikhism. The research is focused to understand the use of six beat variations used for accompaniment by percussionists, changes that have taken place in their patterns by comparing them with the early style. The main outcome of this research is a collective record of some rhythmic patterns of 6 beats which were used with gurbani kirtan. This research will help us to understand the changes in Indian music by the study of the rhythmic patterns used in gurbani kirtan accompaniment.

**Keywords:** Gurbani, Kirtan, Variations, Rhythmic, Tala, Dadra

### INTRODUCTION

Each and every moment of a human life whether happy or sad have direct relation with music. Music is a world of melodious sounds which are brought up together in a very creative and organised way and its form is shaped by the emotions of the presenter or performer. There are many genres of music throughout the world. Gurbani kirtan is a devotional music genre associated with Sikh religion. This devotional style of singing was introduced by Guru Nanak Dev ji the first guru of sikhs. In gurbani kirtan the Sikh followers sings the compositions of *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Dasam Granth*, *Vaaran Bhai Gurdaas*, *Gazalan Bhai Nand laal* in the praise of the almighty. Accompanying them, there are percussionists who play various rhythmic patterns of a different number of beats. The rhythmic metre of 6 beats is usually accompanied with folk or light singing styles and is also used in Gurbani kirtan. In this rhythmic metre, there are a lot of variations played by the percussionists in accordance with the weight distribution of the vocal composition.

The research works the variations of 6 beat rhythmic metres as composed and performed by the percussionists along with kirtan are studied to understand the evolution of music. The research paper is divided into six sections. Review of literature is followed by methodology, findings, discussion, limitation and conclusion in the next sections.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Vim Wan Der Meer (1980) focuses on the components of tala and percussion instruments like hand claps, matra, avartan, sam, khali, mukhra, laya/tempo with its types and how vocal musicians follow them in Hindustani sangeet.<sup>1</sup>

Peter L. Maneul (1983) in the work titled “Concept of tala in semi classical music” summarizes that the concept of tala is less complicated than that of raga. The practical structures and the stress patterns of Rhythm in Indian semi classical music are mentioned.

<sup>1</sup> Meer, W. V. D. (1981). Hindustani Music in the 20th Century. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

Tala names like Deepchandi, Kaherva, Dadra, Dhamaar, Chanchar and Teen taal are also mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

Campbell & Teicher (1997) in their research work titled “Themes and variations on the creative process: Tales of three cultures” compares the musical manners and forms of improvisation in South Indian, Sub Saharan African, Zimbabwean and Vietnamese music to study development of the musical expression and creative potential in young people.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Morris (2001) titled “Variation and process in South Indian music: Some Kritis and their Sangatis”, discusses the rhythmic and melodic transformations of Kriti, a devotional singing style of Carnatik music.<sup>3</sup>

Heidi Chan (2013) studied theoretical aspect of Nadai, the concept of subdivisions of laya and tala of South Indian music. According to the author, learning the concept of Nadai in a better way could be possible by understanding the concepts of tala, laya and jati as they prove themselves useful for the same.<sup>4</sup>

Joe Cheri Ross et. al. (2012) in their conference paper titled “Detecting melodic motifs from audio for Hindustani classic music” gives information by the melodic perspective of the two categories of Hindustani classical music which are Classical music and Karnataka music, parallel focusing on the rhythmic cues.<sup>5</sup>

Mor et.al. (2021) studies the relation between tala, kaida and palta by using mathematical models to check the accuracy of models created through technology when applied to Hindustani sangeet.<sup>6</sup>

The previous studies explore different methods to identify the variations for the purpose of analysis, understanding creative process, testing the accuracy of technological tools etc. The current study proposes to study the changes that occur in six beat tala variations to understand the evolution of musical rhythm.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

A total of 45 recordings Gurbani Kirtan of devotional singers popular in 80’s and popular in 2022 are selected randomly. The data set consists of recordings of compositions in six beats

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1 Peter L Manuel. (December, 1983). The concept of Tala in semi-classical music. National Centre for the Performing Arts. Bombay. 12(4). 7-14.

2 Campbell, Patricia Shehan. Teicher, Judith. (1997). Themes and variations on the creative process: Tales of three cultures. Research Studies in Music Education. 8 (1), 29-41.

3 Morris, Robert. (2001). Variation and Process in South Indian Music: Some Kritis and their Sangatis. Music Theory Spectrum. 23 (1). 74-89.

4 Chan, H. (2013). Exploring Nadai – The Concept of Beat Subdivision in South Indian Music. In R. Janeliauskas (Ed.), PRINCIPLES OF MUSIC COMPOSING: The Phenomenon of Rhythm. Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre and Lithuanian Composers’ Union. <http://xn--urnalai-cxb.lmta.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/Muzikos-komponavimo-principai-XIII.pdf#page=120>

5 Cheri Ross, J., T.P, V., & Rao, P. (2012). DETECTING MELODIC MOTIFS FROM AUDIO FOR HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC. In 13th International Society for Music Information Retrieval Conference (ISMIR 2012). [https://www.ee.iitb.ac.in/course/~daplab/publications/2012/ISMIR2012\\_joe.pdf](https://www.ee.iitb.ac.in/course/~daplab/publications/2012/ISMIR2012_joe.pdf)

6 Mor, B., Garhwal, S., & Kumar, A. (2021). Mathematical modeling of Indian Tala’s Kaidas and Paltas using formal grammar. Journal of Ambient Intelligence and Humanized Computing, 12(7), 7891–7902. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12652-020-02515-9>

performed by Bhai Gurmej Singh, Bhai Gopal Singh, Bhai Samund Singh, Bhai Bakhshish Singh, Bhai Gurmeet Singh, Bhai Randhir Singh, Bhai Dharm Singh Jakhmi, Bhai Baljeet Singh and Bhai Gurmeet Singh naamdhari, Bhai Surjan Singh, Bhai Balbir Singh, Bhai Santa Singh, Bhai Rajinder Singh and Bhai Harjinder Singh, Bhai Ravinder Singh, Bhai Mehtab Singh, Bhai Maninder Singh, Bhai Sukhbeer Singh, Bhai Harjinder Singh, Bhai Gurpreet Singh, Bhai Sukhjinder Singh, Bhai Kamaljeet Singh, Bhai Lakhvinder Singh, Bhai Gurdev Singh, Bhai Jujhar Singh Alwar, Bhai Satvinder Singh and Harvinder Singh. The content analysis is done by critical observation through listening carefully. The researcher is learning and performing the percussion instrument tabla since past 10 years and have experience to identify the sounds by hearing. The recordings are collected from Youtube platform.

The data is collected in the forms of notations to identify the changes. The variation patterns are compared on the basis of composition and technicalities of different gharanas of tabla.

## FINDINGS

Following are some of the notations of the variations of six beat rhythmic patterns used for accompanying the early Gurbani Kirtan singers.

**Table 1 - Variation 1<sup>1</sup>**

X				0			
	1	2	3		4	5	6
	Dha	Dhin	Na Ti		Dha	Tin	Na

Variation 1 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Gurmej Singh.

**Table 2 - Variation 2<sup>2</sup>**

X				0			
	1	2	3		4	5	6
	Dha Ta	Tin	Ti T		Ta	Dhin	Dhi T

Variation 2 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Gurmej Singh.

**Table 3 - Variation 3<sup>3</sup>**

x				0			
	1	2	3		4	5	6
	Dha Tun	Ti Tun	Ti T		Ta	Dhin	Dhi T

Variation 3 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Gopal Singh.

1 Shabad Gurbani. (2021, March 22). AAPNA MEET SUAMI GAIYE VOL.5 I BHAI GURMEJ SINGH I SHABAD GURBANI SANGRAH, FULL AUDIO SONGS JUKE BOX [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbemN0INIF0>  
 2 ws3ks3. (2012, May 7). Har Aapni Kirpa Kari - Bhai Gurmej Singh - Live Sri Harmandir Sahib [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJkgT53rZIk>  
 3 SereneMusiic. (2009, August 31). Bhai Gopal Singh Jee - Darshan Deejai Khol Kivaad [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC43kjfAU88>

**Table 4 - Variation 4<sup>1</sup>**

x			0		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dha	Dhin	Na Ti	Dha	Tun	Na Ti

Variation 4 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Samund Singh.

**Table 5 – Variation 5<sup>2</sup>**

x			0		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dha	Dhin	Na Ti	Ta Ti	Tin	Na Ti

Variation 5 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Bakhshish Singh.

**Table 6 - Variation 6<sup>3</sup>**

X			0		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dhin S	Ta Dhin	S Ta	Dhin S	Ta Na	Na Na

Variation 6 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Ravinder Singh.

**Table 7 - Variation 7<sup>4</sup>**

x			0		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dha	Ti	Ta	Na	Dhi	Ta

Variation 7 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Mehtab Singh.

**Table 8 - Variation 8<sup>5</sup>**

x			0		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dha Ta	Ti TiT	Tum	Ta Ka	Dhin	Dhin

Variation 5 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Gurpreet Singh.

**Table 9 - Variation 9<sup>6</sup>**

x			0		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dha Ta	Tin	Ti T	Ta Ta	Dhin	Dhi T

Variation 9 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Maninder Singh.

1 Kirtan Sewa. (2017, October 11). Bhai Samund Singh - Jyon Jal Mein Jal Aaye Khatana [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4DJgfl6E3E>  
 2 Bhai Bakshish Singh Ji - Topic. (2014, October 9). Sagal Ichh Meri Punniya [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSLxnMJeAaQ>  
 3 Bhai Ravinder Singh - Topic. (2018, August 10). Jeevno Mein Jeevan Paya [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Aqcov\\_C\\_TY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Aqcov_C_TY)  
 4 Red Records Gurbani. (2021, March 31). Milho Pyare Jee - Bh Mehtab singh JALANDAR wale @RedRecordsGurbani/Lyrical video [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ft3jC1Kb-aw>  
 5 Gurbani Shabad Kirtan - Amritt Saagar. (2017, September 26). Gusayi Partap Tuharo - Bhai Gurpreet Singh Bathinda Wale | Gurbani Shabad Kirtan | Amritt Saagar [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT7dkDZrSi4>  
 6 Shabad Kirtan Gurbani - Divine Amrit Bani. (2012, February 16). Gurbani - Ko Banjaro Ram Ko - Bhai Maninder Singh Ji Srinagar Waley [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d0dlvKH4K4>

**Table 10 -Variation 10<sup>1</sup>**

x				0		
1	2	3		4	5	6
Dha	Ti	Ta		Ta	Dhi	Ta

Variation 10 is observed in the shabad performed by Bhai Gurdev Singh.

## DISCUSSION

On comparing the examples of notations given above, it was observed that (1) the nature of variations are shifting from classical to semi classical and further towards light music. (2) The early notation systems were having very simple and beat to beat composed sounds commonly known as boles in Indian music which matches the nature of the early singing styles that had shown their effect on Gurbani kirtan. (3) The rhythmic patterns six beat variations played in modern recordings of gurbani kirtan are having more sounds/boles per beat.

The comparative analysis also suggests that more emphasis on the boles of *kinar* of *chathu* or the small drum of tabla are present in the modern playing style. The percussionists of the modern time are play with the sounds of *dagga* or the bigger drum of the tabla by changing the pressure of their hands on the drum or by dragging their hands on the membrane. This playing with sounds is not present in the early accompaniment of gurbani kirtan. This style in Indian music is known as *Jhol* which creates a light and playful music atmosphere.

## LIMITATION AND SCOPE

The research is limited to the rhythmic patterns of 6 beats used for accompaniment of gurbani kirtan only. Study of variation patterns in other rhythmic metres used in gurbani kirtan can give more accurate results. A comparative analysis of rhythmic patterns used in different genres will more clearly suggest about the influences on music.

## CONCLUSION

Evolution has shown its impact on almost each and every field of this world and same goes for the field of music including all the genres. The genre of gurbani kirtan or devotional singing has also experienced the same effect of time. Not only singing styles, but also the instruments, rhythmic patterns, playing techniques have evolved. This effect can not only be seen on comparing the modern trends with the early trends of gurbani kirtan but also judged on comparing the modern records with the upcoming ones. Furthur research in the field can explore new dimensions of the psychology and sociology of creation of variations.

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