

PESHKAAR – THE ESSENCE OF TABLA REPERTOIRE

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Abstract : *The Solo repertoire of Tabla is very popular. Tabla has occupied the centre stage today. It has acquired the status of a main instrument by its solo presentation. The tireless efforts of the maestros of the past and present have led to the inclusion of variety of compositions in its repertoire. One of such compositions is the Peshkaar, which is presented at the very outset of Tabla solo performance. Peshkaar is a composition that includes in itself most of the elaborative compositions of Tabla like the Kaida and Rela which are edited and played. The composition prompts the listener to incur an idea about the practice and readiness of the Tabla artist and also regarding his control over Laya. Peshkaar is a complete package of the mannerism of artists' presentation, his imagination and his command over laya and layakari. The composition is a profound reflection of the skill, science, improvisation and aesthetics that the artist brings to the fore through his playing. The composition stands distinct from other elaborative and also fixed compositions which do not offer multitude of aspects of rhythm involving creativity. Though Peshkaar is played is at the beginning of Tabla Solo, yet it is a composition which is completely understood at later stages of Tabla learning and this is paradoxical. Years of practice and contemplation must evolve one's Peshkaar into an impromptu composition and that is the beauty and brilliance of the artist. Rigorous practice, musical thinking and contemplation leads to spontaneity wherein music connects to the soul.*

Research Methodology: *Aesthetical approach to analyze the composition and exploration into the need of its evolution through creative skills and intellect.*

Key Words: *Repertoire, Aesthetics, Laya, Improvisation*

INTRODUCTION

The word 'Pesh' is derived from Farsi language which means 'to present'. Peshkaar is the progression of Tabla language from an alphabet to a sentence and then to a paragraph. Peshkaar is presented in the beginning of a Tabla Solo. The composition is an introduction of Tabla presentation that prepares the artist for his subsequent play. There is a fair possibility that the creation of the composition must have been influenced by the vocal form of music called bada khayal which started during the Mughal period. Bada khayal is a gradual expansion of melody in slow tempo. Similarly, Peshkaar is the expansion of alphabets used in the Theka of Taal with gradual progression into phrases and sentences. *Tabla is basically an accompanying instrument. With the origin and popularity of Khayal form of music and seeing the limitations in Tabla playing thereof, Tabla experts started contemplating on the various forms of vocal music and based on their exploration, they tried to create a repertoire of elaborative compositions of Tabla. Peshkaar is the first and the most significant compositions among the elaborative compositions of Tabla. The composition bears a close relation with the Theka of Taal. At the outset of presentation, the basic form of Theka is embellished and ornamented.[1]* Peshkaar is played in slow (vilambit laya) or medium tempo (madhya laya). The composition can be compared to the Alaap of Vocal music, which is sung without the support of rhythm. *Peshkaar is similar to Tabla playing as Alaap is to Vocal music.[2]* The entire structure of the raag is known through the execution of alaap. Similarly, Peshkaar in vilambit laya presents glimpses of most of the elaborative compositions that are played in subsequent presentation of Tabla solo. Peshkaar has less constraints and limitations as compared to elaborative compositions like Kaida or Rela. Tabla Solo presentation starts with Peshkaar in all gharanas (schools of playing) of Tabla except in Benaras Gharana. In Benaras

Gharana, Tabla Solo begins with Uthan. The Peshkaar compositions of Delhi, Ajrada and Farukkhabad gharanas are very popular.

SALIENT FEATURES OF PESHKAAR

- Peshkaar is an elaborate composition.
- The composition is played in slow or medium tempo.
- The Bhari (first half) and the Khali (second half) portions of Peshkaar can be different unlike the Kaida.
- Tihais can be played within the variations (paltas) of Peshkaar.
- Layakari enhances the aesthetics of peshkaar prominently.
- Peshkaar is heard as having an undulating movement though played in rhythm. This is a profound and remarkable feature of the composition. *Peshkaar is unique among Tabla compositions. The variety of phrases, use of layakari, undulating movement and the unpredictability are some of the features that make the composition very unique and outstanding. [3]*
- Phrases and sentences other than those present in the theme of Peshkaar can be used in the composition. *The meaning of Peshkaar is to 'present' a set of new syllables/phrases in a beautiful way. There seems to be an uneven or undulating movement of the composition. [4]*
- Phrases from compositions like kaida and rela can be added meticulously in Peshkaar. However, the musical aptness of such edited compositions is to be considered well and then applied to the composition. *Peshkaar is a special and intricate kind of a beautiful Kaida. The composition has paltas and tihais like the Kaida, and Relas are seldom played due to its intricate and undulating movement. Peshkaar is not played at a faster tempo. If played in faster tempo, the movement and the aesthetical form of Peshkaar is lost. [5]*

TYPES OF PESHKAAR

Peshkaar of two different styles (gharanas) are popular today.

- Delhi gharana peshkaar
- Farrukhabad (Poorab gharana) peshkaar

PESHKAAR OF DELHI GHARANA

The maestros of Delhi gharana were keen on discipline and tradition and hence the elaboration of peshkaar is done similar to a kaida. *An introductory movement similar to kaida but with a different system of permutation. [6]* The peshkaar of Delhi gharana uses phrases like dha, kita, dhati, tirakita, dhina and so on. The paltas (variations) from each word of the theme are made for the elaboration of peshkaar. Peshkaar is played in slow tempo. Delhi gharana peshkaar is rather systematic and straightforward. Much efforts have not been made to improve the aesthetics of the composition. The features of Delhi gharana are prominent with the use of two finger Tita and Chanti, often referred to as Band baaz, the style that produces closed or non-resonant sounds. Delhi and Ajrada

ghranas belong to Band baaz. The peshkaar of Delhi gharana sounds similar to a kaida played at a slower pace.

Peshkaar theme of Delhi gharana

DhaSSkda DhaStit DhaStira KitadhaS 1
X
Titdha DhaStit DhaSDha DhiSnaS 1
2
TaaSSkda TaaStit TaaStira KitadhaS 1
O
Titdha DhaStit DhaSDha DhiSnaS 1
3

PESHKAAR OF FARUKKHABAD GHARANA

The Peshkaar of Farukhabad gharana uses both Lau and Chanti for playing as per the characteristics of the school of playing. Hence the composition is a bit open sounding. The phrases used are DhiSSkda dhintaa, takghidaSna, Tinatinakenataake and so on. This is also called Poorab gharana peshkaar. The name 'Poorab' refers to the schools of playing which produce open or resonant sounds. The style of playing is also known as 'Khula' Baaz. Farukhabad, Lucknow and Benaras gharanas belong to Khula baaz.

The Peshkaar of Farukhabad gharana breaks free of certain limitations of Delhi gharana. The khali and bhari portions of Peshkaar may be different in some variations and they can be with or without tihai. The inclusion of Tihai in the theme / first cycle of taal is a very distinctive feature which attracts the listeners at the very outset of presentation. Another feature of the composition is the pause/silence of at least ¼ beat (devoid of syllables) on some or all of 5th, 9th and 13th beats of the taal. The small silent space adds to the aesthetics of the composition. The phrase 'tinga tina gina nage traka tinga tina gina' was employed in the second half of the composition and chatasra or tisra jaati sentences are added to it. All these features are prominently seen in the peshkaar devised by the legendary Ustad Thirakwa Khan who is considered as the doyen of Farukhabad gharana of Tabla. One of the themes of peshkaar as composed by the maestro containing the features discussed above is as follows:

Dhikdadhinna SdhaSdha dhiSnaSdhaStit dhadhadhinna 1
X
SSdhaSkdadhaS DhiSnaSDhaStit DhaSkitatakadhinS Nadhatinna 1
2
KitatakatiSSkda TiSnaSkitataka tingatinagenataage trakatingatinagena 1
O
TakghedaSnadhaS tiSnaSdhaSSkda dhaStiSnadhaS SkdadhaStiSnaS 1
3

PESHKAAR – THOUGHT AND BEAT

The older name of 'Farshbandi' is preferable that came to be known as 'Peshkaar' today. The word 'Farsh' means 'floor' on which the building stands. Hence the composition lays the foundation for the artist for the entire recital by synchronizing with the rhythm (laya) and facilitating warm up of his fingers for his subsequent play. A lot of work goes into the presentation of Peshkaar. The laya admits of the controlled variations and adapts to diverse rhythmic designs. The maximum aesthetic potential comes to the fore only in Delhi and Ajrada gharana peshkaars and not in the Poorab gharanas.[7]

The aesthetics of Peshkaar can be felt when an artist starts improvising. The artist has memorized and practiced various compositions of Tabla to the extent of exhibiting them merely involuntarily. It's the craftsmanship of the artist that enables him to put forth parts of the compositions learnt in Peshkaar by meaningfully connecting them to the context of his play. The thought and word are so interconnected that the artist may find it difficult or not worry at all to latch on either of the aspects. The structure of Peshkaar is engrained in the intellect and spirit and it is a spontaneous display. At this point, the artist is in a state of 'no thought' when Music is not created, but happens. Music is Divine. The artist transports himself much beyond the science and skill of music. *The tabla artist creates the background of his play through Peshkaar. The meaning of Peshkaar is to present Tabla artistically and intelligently by maintaining the divisions of Taal. The composition is a reflection of unique playing styles of all gharanas (schools of playing) which the artist intends to present. Hence Peshkaar is such a group of syllables/phrases which exhibits the form of Theka, gharana, style, layakari and practice (tayyari) of the artist.* [8] The artist's spontaneity and knowledge of Tihais and apt phrasing according to the two halves of the Taal displaying Khali and Bhari and combining phrases rhyming with dha tinna, dhadha tinna and such syllables towards the end of Khali and the end of Taal are important features and are prerequisites for the presentation of Peshkaar.

CONCLUSION

From the spiritual perspective, Atmic principle is the essence of the entire living creation. The soul carries all the traits and characteristics of human personality. Similarly it is evident from the above discussion that Peshkaar contains the characteristic features and various shades of the entire composition. The composition enables to ignite the intellectual dimension of the artist. In fact, Peshkaar is an outcome of intellect and skill of the artist. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the beauty of the composition lies on the innate tendencies of the artist. Music is a reflection of discipline, attitude, harmony and innate sense of beauty that the creator carries with him. As they say 'Your Music is what You are'. The evolution of Peshkaar not only depends on the technical knowhow, content and the skill of the artist but also on the intellectual and aesthetical sense of the artist. Peshkaar stands tall to be reckoned as the essence of Tabla repertoire. We can say that Peshkaar is the most advanced composition which is played as early at the beginning of a Tabla solo presentation. A well explored knowledge and a practical experience of different compositions of Tabla is essential for the aesthetic presentation of Peshkaar. It can be summed up that though the Peshkaar is presented at the beginning of a Tabla solo, the in depth learning and aesthetical understanding of the composition happens much later in an artist's life after gaining more and more

insight and experience. Even at this point, the composition still remains to be explored and developed while perfection ever seems far and aesthetics keeps improving in the process.

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