

# THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INSTRUMENTALISTS

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**Abstract:** *Indian Classical Music, with its intricate melodic and rhythmic structures, offers a rich landscape for the art of accompaniment, which is vital in enhancing the soloist's performance and creating a cohesive musical experience. This abstract introspects into the nuances of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music, focusing on the role of instrumentalists. Accompaniment in Indian Classical Music is not merely a background activity but an integral part of the musical dialogue. Instruments such as the tabla, mridangam, ghatam, harmonium, sarangi, violin and flute etc. play a significant role in this dynamic interplay. The role of an instrumental accompanist in Indian Classical Music is multi-faceted. It involves providing rhythmic stability, melodic support and enhancing the emotional content of the performance. The tabla, with its sophisticated rhythmic patterns, provides a rhythmic foundation and drives the temporal progression of a performance. The harmonium or sarangi, on the other hand, often shadows the vocalist or lead instrumentalist, offering harmonic support and enhancing the emotive quality of the raga.*

*A significant aspect of accompaniment is the balance between support and improvisation. While the accompanist must follow the lead artist closely, there is also room for spontaneous creativity, making each performance unique. This balance requires deep understanding and mastery of the raga (melodic framework) and tala (rhythmic cycle) being performed. The training of an accompanist involves rigorous practice and an acute sensitivity to the nuances of the main artist's style. An accomplished accompanist can anticipate the soloist's improvisations, respond to their emotional expressions and add layers of complexity without overshadowing the primary performance. This symbiotic relationship enriches the overall musical experience, making accompaniment a highly revered art in itself.*

*The art of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music, especially for instrumentalists, is a complex and sophisticated practice that requires both technical proficiency and profound musical insight. It is a collaborative process that enhances the aesthetic and emotional depth of performances, demonstrating the interdependence and harmony that are the hallmarks of Indian Classical Music.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Classical Music, Tabla, Mridangam, Harmonium, Sarangi*

## INTRODUCTION

Indian Classical Music, revered for its profound depth and intricate aesthetics, stands as a testament to centuries-old traditions and cultural expressions. It comprises two main traditions: Hindustani music from the North and Carnatic music from the South, both sharing common roots yet evolving into distinct styles. Central to the performance of Indian Classical Music is the role of accompaniment, a sophisticated and nuanced art form in its own right. The accompanist's role, especially that of instrumentalists, is pivotal in enhancing and complementing the lead artist's presentation, creating a holistic and immersive musical experience.

Accompaniment in Indian Classical Music is an art that requires not just technical proficiency, but also a deep emotional connection with the music and an ability to blend seamlessly with the lead artist. It involves a sophisticated interaction where the accompanist supports, enhances and sometimes even inspires the soloist. This research paper attempts to dive deep into the intricate art of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music, with a particular focus on the instrumentalists who play a crucial role in this tradition.

## **FINER NUANCES OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC**

Accompaniment in Indian Classical Music transcends the notion of a mere background support. It is an essential element that interweaves with the solo performance to bring out the full spectrum of the raga (melodic framework) and tala (rhythmic cycle). The accompanist not only supports but also interacts with the lead artist, contributing to the performance's dynamism and richness.

### **HISTORICAL EVOLUTION IN ACCOMPANIMENT**

Historically, the tradition of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music can be traced back to the ancient times when vocal music was predominant and instruments played a supportive role. Over centuries, with the evolution of instruments and the refinement of musical forms, the role of the accompanist became more defined and sophisticated. Ancient texts like Bharat Muni's "Natyashastra" and Sharngadev's "Sangeet Ratnakar" have elaboratively provided insights into the early forms of accompaniment. They have documented the significance of various instruments and their roles in enhancing musical performances by highlighting the importance of rhythm (tala) and melody (raga) in creating a cohesive musical experience.

During the medieval period, Indian music saw significant changes with the establishment of the Mughal Empire in the North and the Bhakti movement in the South. The Mughal influence introduced Persian instruments and styles, which were incorporated into the Hindustani music tradition. This period also saw the development of new forms of music like Khayal, Thumri and Dhrupad, which required sophisticated accompaniment.

In the South, the Bhakti movement led to the rapid popularization of devotional music and the refinement of Carnatic music. The compositions of saints like Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri emphasized the importance of melodic and rhythmic accompaniment, paving the way for a more structured approach to instrumental support.

### **TYPES OF ACCOMPANIMENTS**

#### **THE RHYTHMIC ARCHITECTURE OF ACCOMPANIMENT**

The primary responsibility of rhythmic accompanists, such as tabla players in Hindustani music and mridangam players in Carnatic music, is to maintain the tala and provide a rhythmic foundation for the performance. This involves not just keeping time, but also interacting dynamically with the soloist's improvisations.

#### **THE MELODIC FRAMEWORK OF ACCOMPANIMENT**

Melodic accompanists, such as harmonium players, violinists and sarangi players, provide a harmonic and melodic backdrop that supports the main artist. They shadow the soloist, echoing phrases and embellishing the raga with their own improvisations, thereby enhancing the overall musical narrative.

#### **THE EMOTIONAL ASPECT OF ENHANCEMENT IN ACCOMPANIMENT**

An essential aspect of accompaniment is the ability to enhance the emotional expression of the performance. This involves understanding the mood of the raga and the nuances of the composition

and responding appropriately to the lead artist's expressions. A skilled accompanist can elevate the performance by adding depth and emotional richness.

## MAJOR INSTRUMENTS & THEIR ROLE IN ACCOMPANIMENT

### TABLA

The tabla, a pair of drums, is perhaps the most iconic accompanying instrument in Hindustani music. It consists of two drums – the dayan (right-hand drum) and the bayan (left-hand drum). Its primary role is to provide rhythmic support, ensuring the tala's cyclical pattern is maintained throughout the performance. The tabla player must possess an intricate understanding of the tala system and the ability to execute complex rhythmic patterns and improvisations, known as "tihai" and "paltas," which add vibrancy to the performance. The tabla's ability to produce a wide range of tonalities and intricate rhythmic nuances makes it a dynamic accompaniment instrument. The tabla player's role is to maintain the tala and provide rhythmic variations that complement the soloist's improvisations. This requires a deep understanding of complex rhythmic patterns and an ability to anticipate and respond to the soloist's cues.

### MRIDANGAM

In Carnatic music, the mridangam serves a similar purpose to the tabla. It is a double-headed drum that provides the rhythmic foundation for the performance. The mridangam player must be adept at maintaining the tala, executing complex rhythmic patterns and engaging in intricate exchanges with the soloist.

### HARMONIUM

The harmonium, a free-reed organ, is widely popular in Hindustani music for providing melodic accompaniment. It typically follows the lead artist closely, echoing the phrases and providing a harmonic base that enhances the melodic line's emotional texture. The harmonium player must be adept at quick, precise finger movements and have a deep understanding of the raga's intricacies to shadow the soloist effectively.

### SARANGI

The sarangi, a bowed string instrument, is renowned for its close resemblance to the human voice. Its role as an accompanying instrument involves mimicking the vocal nuances of the lead singer, thereby enriching the performance with its emotive and expressive qualities. The sarangi player must master the complex bowing and fingering techniques to achieve the microtonal inflections and gamakas (ornamentations) essential in Indian Classical Music.

### FLUTE

In Carnatic music, the flute is often used for melodic accompaniment, especially in vocal performances. The flautist provides a melodic counterpart to the vocalist, enhancing the performance's depth and texture. The flute's ability to produce smooth, flowing phrases makes it ideal for capturing the essence of the raga.

## VIOLIN

The violin is prominent in both Hindustani and Carnatic music as an accompanying instrument. The violin has indeed adapted uniquely to Indian Classical Music despite its Western origins. As an accompanying instrument, the violin plays a crucial role by following the main artist, often a vocalist or a lead instrumentalist, by providing harmonic and melodic support. The violinist's skill lies in seamlessly following the intricate nuances of the raga, matching the lead artist's improvisations and embellishments. The instrument's versatility allows it to produce a wide range of sounds and emotions, making it an indispensable part of many performances. It is imperative for the Violinists, in Indian Classical Music, to master the gamakas and microtones that characterize the genre, ensuring their accompaniment is both supportive and expressive.

### USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN ON THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT: A JOURNEY OF CAMARADERIE, LEGACY & ELEVATION IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

In a post-concert interview, "Ustad Zakir Hussain" wonderfully narrates his experience of accompanying two great artists of Indian Classical Music namely "Ustad Rashid Khan" & "Pt. Budhaditya Mukherjee".

In the words of Ustad Zakir Husaain, quote, "Getting on stage with Rashid, it was, you know sublime as far as I could tell. We just somehow, was just there & with Budhaditya Mukherjee Sahib, I have to say that it was just like a step further than what it was. The first half with Rashid was as expected for me; fun & enjoyment and great camaraderie & all that stuff. To be able to play with someone like Budhaditya Ji's calibre, of an artist who's of a very high status & then you hear him play like in the same way as great Ustaad's like Vilayat Khan Sahib, you tend to go back into that world & then to be able to pull out information, tabla information, that I've heard great maestros play with those other great maestros & see that this was the place to be able to showcase that with someone of the stature of Budhaditya Mukherjee, was really a very special moment." unquote.

From Ustad Zakir Hussain's quote, one can glean deep insights into the art of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music, highlighting several key aspects:

- **Mutual Respect and Camaraderie:** Ustad Zakir Hussain emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and camaraderie among artists. His description of performing with Ustad Rashid Khan as "fun & enjoyment and great camaraderie" underlines the joy and ease that come from a harmonious relationship between musicians.
- **Elevating the Performance:** Accompanying a highly skilled artist like Pt. Budhaditya Mukherjee allows for a deeper, more profound musical experience. Ustad Zakir Hussain notes that performing with Pt. Budhaditya Mukherjee felt like "a step further," suggesting that the accompanist's role is not just to support but also to enhance and elevate the performance to new heights.
- **Drawing on Historical Legacy:** Ustad Zakir Hussain mentions that playing with Pt. Budhaditya Mukherjee brought him back to the world of legendary maestros like Ustad

Vilayat Khan Sahib. This indicates that an accompanist draws inspiration from the rich historical and cultural legacy of Indian Classical Music, channelling past maestros' styles and techniques to enrich the present performance.

- **Showcasing Skill and Knowledge:** The quote reflects how accompanying a great artist provides a unique platform to showcase one's own skills and knowledge. Ustad Zakir Hussain relishes the opportunity to utilize the "tabla information" he has absorbed from past masters, demonstrating the accompanist's role as a custodian of tradition and a conduit for its contemporary expression.

Ustad Zakir Hussain's reflection highlights that the art of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music is a dynamic, reciprocal relationship. It involves mutual respect, enhances the overall performance, draws on historical traditions and provides an opportunity to exhibit one's own artistry within the context of a collaborative musical journey.

## **THE DYNAMICS OF ACCOMPANIMENT**

### **MUTUALLY SYNCHRONIZED INTERACTION**

The crux of successful accompaniment lies in the synchrony and interaction between the main artist and accompanist. This involves an acute sense of listening, anticipation and response. The accompanist must be able to predict the soloist's improvisations, support their creative expressions and occasionally engage in a musical dialogue, adding to the performance's spontaneity and excitement.

### **ADVANCE ANTICIPATION AND RELEVANT RESPONSE**

A skilled accompanist can anticipate the lead artist's musical ideas and respond in a way that complements and enhances the performance. This requires not just technical skill but also an intuitive understanding of the music and the soloist's style. The accompanist must be able to pick up on subtle cues and adjust their playing accordingly.

### **RIGOROUS PRACTICE, TRAINING, DEDICATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Becoming an accomplished accompanist in Indian Classical Music requires rigorous training and years of dedicated practice. It demands not only technical proficiency but also a profound understanding of the music's emotive and aesthetic aspects. Students often undergo extensive tutelage under seasoned maestros, learning the subtleties of accompaniment and the art of enhancing the main artist's performance without overshadowing it.

### **THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN SUPPORT AND INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION**

One of the significant challenges of accompaniment is maintaining the balance between support and individual expression. The accompanist must ensure that their playing enhances the soloist's performance without overshadowing it. At the same time, they must inject their creativity and individuality into the performance, adding layers of complexity and richness.

## **ROLE IN DIFFERENT PERFORMANCE CONTEXTS**

The role of the accompanist can vary depending on the performance context. In a solo recital, the accompanist's primary responsibility is to support the soloist and enhance their performance. In a duet or ensemble performance, the accompanist may take on a more interactive role, engaging in musical exchanges and contributing more actively to the overall musical narrative.

## **TRAINING IN THE GURU-SHISHYA PARAMPARA**

In the traditional guru-shishya (teacher-student) system, students learn by observing and practicing under the guidance of a master. This involves not just learning the technical aspects of the instrument, but also understanding the nuances of accompaniment, the intricacies of ragas and talas and the subtleties of musical expression.

## **AESTHETIC MUSICAL SENSITIVITY**

A crucial aspect of training is developing musical sensitivity and an intuitive understanding of the music. This involves learning to listen deeply, understanding the emotional content of the music and developing the ability to respond appropriately to the lead artist's expressions. This sensitivity is what allows an accompanist to enhance the performance and create a cohesive musical experience.

## **MUSICALLY RELEVANT IMPROVISATION**

Improvisation is a key element of Indian Classical Music and an accompanist must be adept at improvising within the framework of the raga and tala. This requires a deep understanding of the musical structure and the ability to create spontaneous variations that complement the main artist's improvisations. Mastery of improvisation is what sets apart a skilled accompanist, allowing them to contribute creatively to the performance.

## **VARIOUS ASPECTS OF ACCOMPANIMENT**

One of the significant challenges of accompaniment is maintaining the delicate balance between support and individual expression. The accompanist must ensure that their playing enhances the soloist's performance while also injecting their creativity into the performance without overshadowing it. Another challenge is the need for constant improvisation and creativity. Unlike Western classical music, where the accompaniment is often fixed, Indian Classical Music requires the accompanist to create spontaneous variations and respond to the soloist's improvisations. This demands a high level of skill and musical intuition.

The rewards of mastering the art of accompaniment are manifold. A well-executed accompaniment can elevate the entire musical experience, creating moments of sublime beauty and emotional resonance. For the accompanist, the satisfaction of contributing creatively to a performance and enhancing the lead artist's expression is immensely fulfilling.

Moreover, the interaction between the accompanist and the soloist creates a dynamic and engaging musical dialogue that captivates both the performers and the audience. This collaborative process is one of the most rewarding aspects of Indian Classical Music, fostering a deep connection between the musicians and creating a sense of unity and harmony.

## **ACCOMPANIMENT WITH REFERENCE TO “TABLA”**

When discussing a tabla player's role in accompanying an instrumentalist, several key points should be considered:

### **PREPARATION**

An accompanist must thoroughly prepare before the concert. This involves studying the main artist extensively by listening to recordings, attending recitals and reviewing interviews. This preparation helps the accompanist understand the artist's style and their expectations for accompaniment.

### **PRACTICE SESSIONS**

It is highly recommended for the accompanist to have practice sessions with the main artist before the concert. This allows both musicians to understand each other's preferences and ensures a cohesive performance.

### **INSTRUMENTAL STYLES**

Instruments like the violin, sarangi, shehnai and flute follow the “Gayaki Ang” style, where a single note can be sustained for a long time. In these cases, intricate “layakari” is limited.

In contrast, instruments like the sitar, sarod, santoor and veena follow both, the “Gayaki & Tantrakaari Ang” style, requiring continuous striking or plucking of strings. This also allows for greater scope in “layakari,” and the method of accompaniment differs significantly from the “Gayaki Ang” instruments.

### **ATTENTION TO DETAIL**

Accompanists must pay attention to details such as playing a tihai (a rhythmic pattern repeated three times) during a recital. They should discern whether the main artist prefers a simple theka (basic rhythm) or appreciates the accompanist joining in with the tihai.

### **VOLUME CONTROL**

The accompanist should always ensure that their playing does not overpower the main artist. Adjusting the volume of the “bols” (tabla syllables) according to the situation is crucial.

### **TUNING**

The tabla must be finely tuned throughout the performance. The accompanist should immediately retune the instrument if it goes out of tune.

### **JUGALBANDI (MUSICAL DIALOGUE)**

When the main artist switches to the “drut laya” (fast tempo), a jugalbandi or sawaal-jawaab (question-answer) segment may occur. This involves an exchange of musical phrases between the artists, exciting the audience. However, whether or not to include jugalbandi depends on the main artist's preference.

### **SOLO TRAINING**

Before accompanying sitar, sarod or santoor players, a tabla player should focus on solo training. Emphasis should be on practicing specific bols like ‘tit,’ ‘tirkit,’ ‘dHINGIN,’ ‘din din,’ and ‘dhir-

dhir,' along with "rela" and various "chalans". Understanding and practicing different "tihais" is also essential for impactful and spontaneous accompaniment.

### **ADAPTATION AND IMPROVISATION**

Compositions used in a tabla solo recital should most preferably be changed adapted when accompanying an artist. They most often should not be incorporated "as it is" in order to maintain the decorum of accompaniment. Improvisations should be spontaneous and responsive to the instrumentalist's phrases, avoiding prefixed compositions.

### **ENGAGEMENT DURING AALAP AND JOD**

The accompanist should listen attentively to the "aalap" (introductory part) and "jod" (intermediate part) sections, acknowledging the main artist's expressions. During the "jhallah" (concluding part), where speed increases gradually, rigorous practice of the "teentaal theka" (Na dhin dhin Na) is necessary to deliver an efficient accompaniment.

By focusing on these aspects, a tabla player can provide an effective and harmonious accompaniment that can certainly ensure the enhancement of the overall performance.

## **AESTHETIC & PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF ACCOMPANIMENT**

### **PHILOSOPHICAL EXPRESSION**

The art of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music is deeply rooted in the philosophical and aesthetic traditions of Indian culture. It embodies the principles of rasa (emotional essence) and bhava (expression of emotion), which are central to Indian aesthetics. The accompanist plays a crucial role in enhancing these emotional expressions, contributing to the overall rasa of the performance.

### **SPIRITUALITY IN MUSIC**

Music in India is often seen as a spiritual practice and the accompanist's role is imbued with a sense of devotion and reverence. This spiritual dimension adds depth to the accompanist's involvement, making their contribution not just a technical support but a meaningful part of the musical and spiritual journey.

### **AESTHETIC EXPRESSION**

The aesthetic sensibility of Indian Classical Music is characterized by its emphasis on nuance, subtlety and emotional depth. The accompanist must be attuned to these aesthetic principles, ensuring that their playing enhances the beauty and emotional impact of the performance. This requires a deep appreciation of the music's aesthetic qualities and the ability to express these through their instrument.

## **FUTURE OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC**

### **MODERN-DAY TRENDS**

The contemporary landscape of Indian Classical Music is marked by a blend of tradition and innovation. While the core principles of accompaniment remain rooted in tradition, modern



accompanists are also exploring new styles and techniques, incorporating influences from various genres and cultures. This fusion of old and new is creating exciting possibilities for the art of accompaniment, allowing it to evolve and adapt to contemporary tastes.

### TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in the dissemination and evolution of Indian Classical Music. Digital platforms, online tutorials and virtual performances are providing new avenues for learning and collaboration. For accompanists, this means greater access to resources and opportunities to connect with a global audience. Technology is also enabling new forms of accompaniment, with electronic instruments and digital effects adding new dimensions to traditional performances.

### CONSERVATION OF TRADITION

Amidst these contemporary trends, there is a strong emphasis on preserving the rich traditions of Indian Classical Music. This involves not just maintaining the technical and stylistic aspects of accompaniment, but also preserving the cultural and philosophical values that underpin this art form. Institutions, festivals and maestros play a crucial role in this preservation, ensuring that the essence of Indian Classical Music is passed on to future generations.

### CONCLUSION

The art of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music, particularly for instrumentalists, is a complex and deeply rewarding practice. It requires a blend of technical skill, deep musical understanding and intuitive interaction. Instrumentalists like tabla players, harmonium artists, sarangi players and flautists play crucial roles in this tradition, each contributing uniquely to the music's overall intricacy. As an indispensable part of Indian Classical Music, accompaniment enriches the performance, creating a dynamic and engaging musical dialogue that captivates both the performer and the audience.

This research paper has explored the historical context, the roles of various instruments, the dynamics of accompaniment, the training and skill development required, the challenges and rewards and the aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of accompaniment in Indian Classical Music. The future of this art form lies in a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, ensuring that it continues to evolve while preserving its rich heritage.

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