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Writers on Indian music have generally had less difficulty defining *tala* than *raga,* which remains a somewhat abstract, intangible entity. Nevertheless, an examination of the concept of *tala* in Hindustani semi-classical music reveals that, in many cases, *tala* itself may be a more elusive and abstract construct than is commonly acknowledged, and, in particular, that just as a *raga* cannot be adequately characterized by a mere schematic of its ascending and descending scales, similarly, the number of *matra*-s in a *tala* may be a secondary or even irrelevant feature in the identification of a *tala.*

The treatment of *tala* in *thumri* parallels that of *raga* in *thumri,* sharing *thumri's* characteristic folk affinities, regional variety, stress on sentimental expression rather than theoretical complexity, and a distinctively loose and free approach to theoretical structures. The liberal use of alternate notes and the casual approach to *raga* distinctions in *thumri* find parallels in the loose and inconsistent nomenclature of light-classical *tala*-s and the tendency to identify them not by their theoretical *matra*-count, but instead by less formal criteria like stress patterns.

Just as most *thumri raga*-s have close affinities with and, in many cases, origins in the diatonic folk modes of North India, so also the *tala*-s of *thumri* (viz., Deepchandi—in its fourteen- and sixteen-beat varieties—Kaharva, Dadra, and Sitarkhani) appear to have derived from folk meters. Again, like the flexible, free *thumri raga*-s, the folk meters adopted in semi-classical music acquired some, but not all, of the theoretical and structural characteristics of their classical counterparts.

We may assume that, both in the past and the present, many folk musicians have felt no need to apply particular names to the simple meters or *tala*-s they employed. Many such meters, in the process of being incorporated in stylized forms into classical or semi-classical music, acquired names which appear to derive from the folk *genres* with which they were associated; the *tala* names Dhamar, Jhumra, Dadra, Qawwali, and Chanchar are probable examples.

Aside from possessing standardized names, classical *tala*-s also have certain fundamental theoretical attributes, including the specific number of *matra*-s, and internal structural divisions with stressed and unstressed *tali* and *khali* sections. The clearest representation or embodiment of these features is the *tala*'s *theka,* a fixed series of mnemonic syllables denoting drum strokes, contained within one cycle of the *tala. Tala* itself remains a more broad and abstract concept than *theka,* whose role has been likened to that of scale in a *raga.*[1] Thus, during accompaniment, the *theka* may often be present only in a highly ornamented form, or, during a *tabla* solo, it may be absent for extended periods, but the concept of the *tala* remains intact in the minds of the performer and the attentive listener; moreover, the structural features of the *tala* (e.g., *tali* and *khali* sections) are often preserved in solos (especially *kaida*-s). Variant *theka*-s may also be used within a given *tala.*

In classical music, these variant *theka*-s do not differ remarkably from each other (e.g., Teentala "dha dhin dhin dha dha . . ." vs. "na dhin dhin na na . . ."), and the application of *tala* names, codified by innumerable descriptive and pedagogical works, is orderly and consistent. Such is not the case in the *tala*-s of light-classical music (in particular, *thumri*). In modern practice, the names Jat, Deepchandi, Chanchar and Addha are all used by different musicians in different regions to denote either or both of the related fourteen- or sixteen-*matra tala*-s whose *theka*-s are given below, while Addha may also denote distinct eight- or sixteen-*matra tala*-s.[2]

Fourteen matra-s: ẋdha dhin - /²dha dha dhin - /
ọta tin - /³dha dha dhin -

Sixteen matra-s: ẋdha - dhin - /²dha dha dhin - /
ọta - tin - /³dha dha dhin -

The latter *tala* differs only in the insertion of the silent *matra*-s two and ten; otherwise, the strokes are identical.

The clearęst manifestation of the affinities of semi-classical *tala*-s with folk meters is the popularity of simple meters of eight and sixteen *matra*-s in *thumri*. Prior research[3] has suggested an evolutionary relationship between modern *thumri* and the medieval folk-derived dance and song form *charchari* (*chachchari, chanchari*), noting some correspondence between certain of the *tala*-s used in each. The word *chanchar,* denoting the *tala*-s most characteristic of modern *thumri,* clearly derives from *charchari.* The medieval *charchari* song was sung in the *tala* of the same name, of which variants in eight or sixteen *matra*-s were common; these *tala*-s resembled the popular Rasa *tala* of contemporary folk music.[4] We may presume a natural similarity, and hereditary affinity, between these meters and the eight-*matra* Kaharva *tala* which predominates in the folk music of North India today. Kaharva *tala* was seldom, if ever, used in the nineteenth century *bandish* (or *bol bant*) *thumri,* where the classical Teentala prevailed, in accordance with that genre's close relationship with *khyal. Bandish thumri* anthologies, however, do reveal that a number of such compositions were set to Punjabi Teentala,[5] which has certain structural affinities with Kaharva. Use of eight- and sixteen-*matra tala*-s is quite common in the modern *bol banao thumri;* these *tala*-s include Kaharva, and the sixteen-*matra tala*-s Sitarkhani, Punjabi *theka* (Punjabi Teentala), Jat and Addha.

Kaharva *tala* appears in a number of variants, all of eight *matra*-s; most of these iambically stress the *sam* (first *matra* of the *tala*) by preceding it with an accented upbeat on the penultimate *matra* (seven), as in the following, most common *theka*:

ẋdha ge na ti / ọna ka dhi na / (dha...)

This iambic, "heartbeat" rhythm pervades North Indian folk music; drummers often intensify the iambic effect by depressing the left hand drum head on the *sam* in order to increase skin tension and raise the pitch of that beat.

Punjabi Teentala, Sitarkhani, and, in some traditions, Addha are sixteen-*matra tala*-s which reflect certain affinities with Kaharva and, in some cases, with Deepchandi. Written sources are not consistent, however, in describing or distinguishing these *tala*-s. Some sources[6] equate Sitarkhani with Addha, giving its *theka* as below:

×dha dhin - dha /²dha dhin - dha /⁰dha tin - ta /³ta dhin - dha

The author, however, has never heard this *theka* used in *thumri.* Far more common in *bol banao thumri* is the *tala* given below:

×dha -dhin - dha /²dha -dhin - ta /⁰ta -tin - dha /³dha -dhin - dha

This *theka* is called Punjabi by Sharma,[7] but it has been my experience that musicians simply refer to it as Sitarkhani.

Let us examine the Addha variants more closely. *Tabliya* Taranath Rao of the Ajrara *gharana* enumerates three traditions. In the first, Addha is the sixteen-*matra tala* having the *theka,* also called Sitarkhani by Sharma, described above. From one perspective, this *theka* resembles that of Teentala, with the third stroke in each *vibhag* (internal structural subdivision) omitted. From another perspective, it resembles the common Sitarkhani, differing only in the placement of the second stroke in each *vibhag.*

Teentala: ×dha dhin dhin dha /²dha dhin dhin dha /
⁰dha tin tin ta /³ta dhin dhin dha

Addha #1: ×dha dhin - dha /²dha dhin - dha /
⁰dha tin - ta /³ta dhin - dha

Sitarkhani: ×dha -dhin - dha /²dha -dhin - dha /
⁰dha -tin - dha /³dha -dhin - dha

Of greater interest is the similarity-particularly noticeable at slow tempo-between the commencement of Addha # 1 and fourteen-*matra* Deepchandi:

Addha #1: ×dha dhin - dha /²dha dhin...
Deepchandi: ×dha dhin - /²dha dha dhin...

In view of this similarity, it is not surprising that a second tradition (also cited by Rao) equates Addha with Deepchandi, and/or sixteen-*matra* Deepchandi. The third tradition of Addha, in fact, is essentially identical to this latter *tala*, but is counted in eight rather than sixteen-*matra*-s. Taranath Rao calls the *tala* with the following *theka* "Addha-dhumali":

x
dha dhin dhadha tin /0 ta tin dhadha dhin

Sharma[8] calls this *theka* Qawwali, and it is presumably the same as the "Addha-kaoli" cited by Banerjee in 1886 as the most characteristic *tala* of *thumri*.[9] This *theka*-very common in *thumri*-is identical to that of sixteen-*matra* Deepchandi, and is often called Jat today:

x
dha - dhin - /2 dha dha tin - /0 ta - tin - /3 dha dha dhin -

These structural affinities enable us to hypothesize a certain relationship between the eight-*matra* Addha *tala* formerly popular in *thumri*, and the modern versions of Deepchandi in both fourteen and sixteen-*matra*-s. More importantly, the name Addha given to these three interrelated *tala*-s (of eight, fourteen, and sixteen-*matra*-s) highlights their structural similarities, and suggests that these similarities (in commencement, order of strokes, etc.) are more important as distinguishing criteria than the number of *matra*-s in a given *tala*.

The development and current treatment of Chanchar *tala*-s (Deepchandi, Jat, Addha, etc.) tend to corroborate this hypothesis. The evolution of these *tala*-s, unfortunately, is not clearly documented; evidence suggests that Chanchar (in both fourteen- and sixteen-*matra* varieties) may have been popular in folk music before the nineteenth century (as it is now), but that it was not incorporated into semi-classical music until the rise of the *bol banao thumri* in the late nineteenth century. Thus, early references to the *tala*, under its various names, are few and inconsistent. Versions of Charchari *tala*-s described in the thirteenth century *Sangitaratnakara* appear to have had eight, eleven or sixteen *matra*-s. Sixteen-*matra* Chanchar, described above, is still popular, but no *tala* of eleven *matra*-s is used in *thumri*. Moreover, we should hesitate to infer a direct relation between thirteenth century Charchari and twentieth century Jat, because of the exiguity of references to these *tala*-s in the six centuries between.

Nineteenth century treatises like *Nadavinoda* and the voluminous *Sangita Raga Kalpadruma* do not refer to Deepchandi, Chanchar, or Jat *tala*-s, although they mention many other *tala*-s. The *Kalpadruma* cites Hori as the *tala* of one song; the traditional association of Deepchandi with Hori suggests, albeit inconclusively, that that *tala* may have been in use in nineteenth century folk and/or semi-classical music. The word Deepchandi, as denoting a *tala*, does not appear until early twentieth century sources (e.g., record labels like Sarasvati Bai's "Hori Deepchandi" MD-1555), although *Kalpadruma* contains a song entitled "Deepchand" (moonlight). The fourteen-*matra tala* corresponding to modern Deepchandi, however, is described by Banerjee in 1886[10] as Jat or Yat *tala*; similarly, Platts,[11] writing in 1884, defines Jat as "a kind of musical rhythm

(generally sung at the *Holi* festival)". We can infer, then, that both fourteen- and sixteen-*matra* Deepchandi, by the names "Jat" and, perhaps, "Qawwali", were somewhat familiar in the nineteenth century. Jat, Chanchar and Deepchandi are today common in the folk music of Uttar Pradesh, especially in songs associated with the vernal *Holi* festival. Hence, their induction into semi-classical music parallels, rather than precedes, the rise of the *bol banao thumri* in the late nineteenth century. Regional variety may account for much of the confusion and inconsistency regarding the use of the names Jat, Chanchar, and Deepchandi.

Matters are further complicated by the existence of a ten-*matra tala* called "Jat" *tala,* or "Charchari", described in the *Radhagovind Sangitsar* of 1804, and a version of Deepchandi in ten *matra*-s cited in the *Sangita Sudarshana* of 1935, written by a disciple of the nineteenth century sitarist Amritsen.[12] The structure of the *Radhagovind Sangitsar*'s Jat—2+3+2+3—as well as the phonetic similarity of Jat and Jhap invite obvious comparison with the common Jhaptala, whose *theka* is:

$\overset{x}{}$dhin na /$\overset{2}{}$dhin dhin na /$\overset{0}{}$tin na /$\overset{3}{}$dhin dhin na

Jhaptala also resembles modern fourteen- and sixteen-*matra* Deepchandi in that all have the same number of drum strokes, *viz.,* ten. Whatever the origin of Jat-*tala* of ten beats and its relation to Jhaptala, the tradition has long since expired, presumably because the popularity of Jhaptala renders Jat-*tala* superfluous. Moreover, modern *thumri* is not sung in any *tala* of ten *matra*-s, nor can we assume that the *Sangitsar* specimen in Jat-*tala*—a song in *raga* Sarang, which is regarded now as a *khyal raga*—was a *thumri.*

We have suggested that disparate regional tendencies may account for some of the current inconsistency in using the names Chanchar, Deepchandi and Jat to denote either or both fourteen- or sixteen-*matra tala*-s. This inconsistency may also reflect the structural similarity of these *tala*-s, and the idea that the identity of number and order of strokes in the *theka* is more important as a generic feature than the number of *matra*-s. This identity and the appropriateness of the loose nominal distinction between the two *tala*-s, are particularly evident in a style of playing popular during the turn of the century, in which the *tala* is so drastically syncopated that one cannot ascertain whether it is in fourteen or sixteen *matra*-s. The style is called *langra* (meaning "lame, limping"), in accordance with its uneven pulse. In *langra,* the *bol* of the Deepchandi *theka* is maintained (dha dhin dha dha dhin etc.), but the pulse is deliberately rendered irregular, albeit somewhat predictably. If one chooses to regard a typical *langra* Deepchandi *theka* as being in sixteen *matra*-s, then *matra*-s one, seven, and thirteen are grossly elongated at the expense of the others; conversely, if one regards it as a syncopated fourteen-*matra tala,* then the first *matra* is again too long, along with *matra*-s six and eight, while most of the remaining *matra*-s are too short.

These syncopations are best illustrated by using the NUTs ("nominal units of time") system of measurement, which corresponds to the cents system of pitch measurement, except that the latter is logarithmic, while NUTs are linear.[13]

The excerpt below shows one cycle of the *tala* from an early recording (*ca.* 1925?) of Rasoolan Bai singing a *thumri* in Bhairavi (GE 3280). First, the cycle is measured and analyzed as if the *tala* were of fourteen *matra*-s. Setting the length of one cycle at 1400 NUTs, each *matra* would then ideally have a value of 100 NUTs (regardless of the tempo). The symbol + 58, for example, denotes a *matra* of 158 NUTs, which is considerably longer than the ideal. Divergences of one or two NUTs are inconsiderable and imperceptible, but intervals of ten or more, at this tempo, become significant. Thus the gross elongation of *matra*-s one, six, seven, and eight, and the attenuation of the other *matra*-s (as evident below) are clearly audible in performance.

Matra:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Theka:	dha	dhin	-	dha	dha	dhin	-	ta	tin	-	dha	dha	dhin	-
Length:	+87	+58	-30	-23	+36	+67	-27		-5		-34		-29	

Alternately, the same excerpt could be analyzed as if it were in sixteen *matra*-s; here, the total number of NUTs in one cycle is set at 1600, such that the ideal length of one *matra* would again be 100 (x16 = 1600). Note the pronounced irregularities; here the elongated beats are seven and, again, one.

Matra:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Theka:	dha	-	dhin	-	dha	dha	dhin	-	ta	-	tin	-	dha	dha	dhin	-
Length:	+14		-19		-20	-12	+69		-10		-2		+9		-24	-5

Whether analyzed as a sixteen- or fourteen-*matra tala*, the *theka* is extremely irregular and incompatible with any metrical framework. Given such a tradition, it is not surprising that musicians do not regard the difference between fourteen- and sixteen-*matra* varieties of Deepchandi significant enough to merit separate names. Thus, the prevalence of *langra* must have contributed to the practice of using all four names (Chanchar, Jat, Deepchandi, and Addha) to denote a *tala* which is identified primarily by its strokes, rather than by the number of *matra*-s it has.

Langra can be heard on a number of early twentieth century recordings, by artists like Rasoolan Bai and Malka Jan (e.g., HMV GC-3-13488). Its appeal may have derived from the rather free-rhythmic character it lends to the *tala* and the performance in general, thereby complementing the rhapsodic nature of the *vistar* which also is largely free-rhythmic. The tradition has been eclipsed, however, and is only rarely heard today.[14]

While pronounced temporal modifications in *tala*-s may not be widespread in modern *thumri*, a certain number of variant *theka*-s may occasionally be encountered. Some of these variants have regional derivations, particularly in the

case of the Punjab. The Kaharva variant preferred by Patiala singers, for example, is particularly distinctive; the stroke on the fifth *matra* includes a downward snap of the left-hand index finger:

$$\overset{\times}{\text{dha}} - \text{na na} \;/\; \overset{0}{\text{tin}} - \text{dha (ti)} \;/\; \overset{\times}{\text{(dha...)}}$$

A Punjabi version of Dadra *tala* (six *matra*-s) incorporates the syncopated second beat characteristic of the seven-*matra* Muglai *tala* of the Punjab and Rajasthan:

Standard Dadra tala: $\overset{\times}{\text{dha}}$ dhin na / $\overset{\times}{\text{ta}}$ tin na

Muglai tala: $\overset{0}{\text{tin}}$ -kat -te / $\overset{1}{\text{dhin}}$ dhin dhage tirakita

Punjabi Dadra tala: $\overset{\times}{\text{dha}}$ -dhin -na / $\overset{0}{\text{dha}}$ tin na

Patiala singers occasionally prefer a variant of Deepchandi *theka* given below (as in Barkat Ali Khan's EMI GTCS 02B 5008):

$$\overset{\times}{\text{dha}}\ \text{tira kita} \;/\; \overset{2}{\text{dha}}\ \text{dha dhin} - \;/\; \overset{0}{\text{ta}}\ \text{tira kita} \;/\; \overset{3}{\text{dha}}\ \text{dha dhin} -$$

In other common variants, the silent *matra*-s—three, seven, ten, and fourteen—are filled in with (predominantly dampened) strokes:

$$\underline{\overset{\times}{\text{dha}}\ \text{-ge}}\ \underline{\text{dhin}}\ \underline{\text{kat tete}}\ /\ \underline{\overset{2}{\text{dha}}\ \text{gege}}\ \underline{\text{dha dhage}}\ \underline{\text{tin}}\ \underline{\text{kat tirakita}}$$

$$\underline{\overset{0}{\text{ta}}\ \text{-kat}}\ \underline{\text{tin}}\ \underline{\text{kat tete}}\ /\ \underline{\overset{3}{\text{dha}}\ \text{-ge}}\ \underline{\text{dha gege}}\ \underline{\text{dhin}}\ \underline{\text{dha gege}}$$

In this paper, we have not attempted to standardize or even catalogue in detail the inconsistent application of the terms Jat, Deepchandi, Chanchar, and Addha to certain fourteen- or sixteen-*matra tala*-s. Rather, our intent has been to demonstrate that the very flexibility and inconsistency of these appellations illustrate a distinctive and previously overlooked aspect of this group of semi-classical *tala*-s, namely, that they are identified primarily by their stress patterns and the number and order of structural strokes, rather than by their number of *matra*-s. The latter feature is thus an important structural criterion only in *tala*-s used in classical music. In *thumri,* by contrast, the element of metrical freedom corresponds to that of melodic freedom. Just as a singer may choose to inject phrases from Pilu, Khamaj, and Ghara into a rendition of *raga* Kafi, similarly, a *tabliya,* when told by the vocalist to "play Deepchandi," may play a *tala* of fourteen *matra*-s, sixteen *matra*-s, or a syncopated *langra* which is neither. Moreover, a given *thumri* composition can be sung in entirely different *tala*-s; the Bhairavi *thumri, Ras ke bhare tore nain,* for example, is recorded in Kaharva *tala* by Siddeshvari Devi (on EMI 6TCS02B 5040), in Dadra by Gauhar Jan (on an early Gramophone Co. record), and in Deepchandi by Begum Akhtar (Sangeet Natak Akademi Archives). A variety of regional variant *theka*-s may also be

employed. While a vocalist might explicitly prefer or request a particular variant, the *bol* of Deepchandi, whether in a fourteen- or sixteen-*matra* context, would suffice to make the *tala* recognizable as Deepchandi (or Chanchar, Jat, etc.), just as a singer's liberal and free rendition of *raga* Kafi could still be recognized as being Kafi by the presence of certain key structural elements (characteristic phrases). This liberty again illustrates the fact that *tala* as well as *raga* may be a broad, abstract, and somewhat intangible entity which cannot be defined in terms of simple theoretical formulae.

References:

1. M. R. Gautam, *The Musical Heritage of India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1980), p. 18.
2. According to one tradition, Chanchar differs from Deepchandi and Jat only in being customarily rendered in fast tempo. In all versions, *matra*-s six and seven in fourteen- and sixteen-*matra* Deepchandi may be rendered either with *dhin* (as shown here) or the dampened stroke *tin*.
3. Shatrughna Shukla, "Thumri ki Utpatti, Vikas, aur Shailiyan" (Delhi University: Ph.D. dissertation, 1973), pp. 127 ff.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
5. See, e.g., specimens in Gangadhar Rao Telang's *Thumari Sangrah* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Sangit Natak Academy, 1977).
6. Bhagwat Sharan Sharma, *Taal Prakaash* (Hathras: Sangeet Karyalaya 1978), p. 107.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
9. K. D. Banerjee, *Gita Sutra Sar*, Vol. II. Translated and annotated by H. S. Banerji (Calcutta: N. N. Banerji, 1941), p. 66
10. *Op. cit.*, p. 62.
11. John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1968), p. 376.
12. *In* Shukla, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-9.
13. The system of NUTs was conceived in a series of seminars led by Dr. N. A. Jairazbhoy at the University of California, Los Angeles. NUTs measurements can be performed in two ways: first, the filtered sound signal may be "frozen" and measured, bit by bit, on a storage oscilloscope; alternately, a greatly decelerated (and filtered) version may be recorded on reel-to-reel tape, and after manually locating the exact position of each rhythmic event in question, a corresponding place on the tape itself may be marked with a grease pencil. The length of the average, "ideal" beat or measure is then computed, multiplied accordingly (by "x") to equal 100; all other measurements are similarly multiplied by "x" and the divergences are noted. See Jairazbhoy's "Nominal Units of Time: A Counterpart for Ellis' System of Cents," in *Essays in Honour of Peter Crossley-Holland on his 65th Birthday* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1983).
14. *Langra* is also discussed in Rebecca Stewart's "The Tabla in Perspective" (UCLA: Ph.D. dissertation, 1974).