

## Tala and its significance



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### Abstract

*Tala originated from an ancient music concept traceable to Vedic era texts Hinduism. It is the root of the sense of establishing music. "Ta" stands for "tandava nritya" and "La" stands for "Lasya nritya". Tala is explained in detail in Taladasa-pranas. Tala is a very important aspect for any musician. Music without tala is like a face without a nose. This research paper mainly focuses on types of Talas and their variations in Carnatic Music. To Explain this in detail, I have introduced each Tala and its sub-types following the number of letters bearing by Tala, and its regular usage in Carnatic Music. Saptatalas and their impact on music are discussed with an effective presentation in tables. Also discussed Taladasa-Pranas which play a key role in Music. Later given a note on Shadangas in Tala and their significance with tables. It is stated that Music without tala makes the listener listless i.e. does not invigorate or stimulate the listener. The birth of meter in poetry and tala in music would have been in a normal way. The entire universe is bound by rhythmic movement.*

**Keywords :** Shadangas, Taladasa-Pranas, Chapu-tala, Significance, Music, Classical Music.

### Research Paper

#### Introduction

Tala is a measure of time. Musical compositions, instrumental accompaniments and dance are regulated by tala. Each accompaniment in a concert must follow the tala of the principal musician. Tala in the Indian tradition embraces the time dimension of music, the means by which musical rhythm and form were guided and expressed. While a tala carries the musical meter, it does not necessarily imply a regularly recurring pattern. In the major classical Indian music traditions, the beats are hierarchically arranged based on how the music piece is to be performed. The most widely used tala in the South Indian system is Aditalam. In the North Indian system, the most common tala is teental.

#### The Origin of the Word 'Tala':

"The origin of the word tala is from the root Taal in the sense of the established music and dance seem to be established in Tal".<sup>[1]</sup> The origin of many words is attributed to certain verbal roots, 'Maatra' which signifies "measure" is from the verbal root 'maa' and the word 'chanda' originates from the root chanda. Scholars are of the opinion that originates from the root 'tal' to establish, as a song, music, and dance are established in tala.

The origin of Tal is stated to be from the combination of 'ta' from tandava nritya (male dance) and 'la' from lasya nritya (female dance). In sangita darpana Tal is said to be the union of 'ta i.e., Sankara or Siva, and 'la' i.e. Parvathi i.e. Sakti namely" lasya" In the work "Rangarnava" the sound, which is produced by the striking of the two palms is known as The action of keeping time. The author has given the origin of Tal as from the addition of a suffix to the root 'Tal'.

Tala is produced by joining and separating of the two palms. The one who is pervaded by the Ten Pranas knows tala and 'ala'. Narahari Chakravarti has taken the following Sloka mentioned in his work, "Bhakti Ratanakara" from 'Ratnamala'. According to this Sloka 'taakara' is Kartikeya, 'akara' is Vishnu and 'lakara' is Maruta another tala is based on these tree deities.

In the ancient works we find much such interpretation regarding the origin of Tal though the actual interpretation may differ, the basic elements and their expressions do not differ. The attempts which were made to split up the entire concept of time into measures of time such as metre and words like ta, dhit, thu, nna, was called tala.

The music, which was presented by Bharata, Infront of the gods was known as Marga Sangitha and five

Marga talas were used. Regarding Marga and Desi, it is stated that Marga is that which was presented by Bharata in front of the Gods. Desi was that which was liked by the people of different regions.

According to the texts, Desi originated from Marga talas. They belong to three classes-Suddha, Salaga and Sankeerna.

### 1. Suddhatala

“Suddhatala is the tala where there is no shade of any other tala. It is of two types: Marga-Suddha and Desi-Suddha. Dhruva tala is worth mentioning in Desi Suddha tala forms. Out of the 108 talas discussed by the poet Somadeva, first seven are “Prathama tala, 27 are ‘Suddha tala’ and the other are ‘mixed tals’.

### 2. Salagatales

Salagatales are those talas which are created by mixing two talas. They are 2 types-Marga Saalaga and Desi Saalaga. Kirti tala is an example of Marga Saalaga which is a combination of Vibhinna and Kokila priya talas. Dhruvarupakam of the south is an example of Desi Saalaga.

### 3. Sankeernatalas

Sankeernatalas are those talas which are created by mixing some talas. Sankeernatalas are divided into Marga and desi. Simhanandana is an example of Marga Sankeerna Tala. In this tal Caccatputa Rati Tala Darpana, Kokilapriya, Abhanga and Mudrika are combined.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Carnatic Music is the system of music commonly associated with the southern part of the Indian subcontinent, with its area roughly confined to four modern states of India: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. It is one of two main sub-genres of Indian classical music that evolved from ancient Hindu traditions; other being the Hindustani music.

Carnatic music uses a various classification systems for the specification of talas. The Suladi Sapta Tala System is the most widely used and is universally accepted as standard, while others like Chapu, Chanda and Melakarta Tala System are also in use.

According to the Suladi Sapta Tala System, there are seven families /types of talas, each one can fit in one of the five jatis. A tala cannot exist without the reference to one of the five jatis. thus, making thirty-five possible talas. Each tala cycles through a

particular number of beats called aksharas, with a complete cycle forming an avartana.

The Suladi Sapta tala system uses three of the six angas in different arrangements. In order to make things easy and accurate method of calculating musical time, six angas have been devised. They are known as Shadangas or six angas. Three out of six angas are as follows:

S.No	Anga	Symbol
1.	Anudrutha	U
2.	Drutha	O
3.	Laghu	I
4.	Guru	S
5.	Plutha	IS
6.	Kakapada	+

Table : 1 The Table of Shadangas

1	Chaturshra Jaati	4 aksharas	Tha Ka Di Mi
2	Tishra Jaati	3 aksharas	Tha Ki Ta
3	Mishra Jaati	7 akshars	Tha Ki Ta, Tha Ka Di Mi
4	Khanda Jaati	5 aksharas	Tha Ka Tha Ki Ta
5	Sankiranam Jaati	9 aksharas	Tha Ka Di Mi, Tha Ka Tha Ki Ta

Table : 2 JAATHI : Of the Shadangas, only laghu has variations in number of aksharas. It is called Laghu Jaati bedha. There are 5 Jaatis.

1	Dhruva Taal	I O I I
2	Matya Taal	I O I
3	Rupaka Taal	O I
4	Jhampa Taal	I U O
5	Triputa Taal	I O O
6	Ata Taal	I I O O
7	Ek taal	I

Table: 3 The Symbol for Laghu is a vertical line, as I, that Drutha is a small circle O, and that for Anudrutha is a semicircle, U.

### Tala Dasa Pranas

“Tala has ten important features called Dasapranas. The following is the brief description of these Dasapranas:

- Kaala: Duration or measurement of time.

- **Marga:** Marga means a way of the method. It indicates the duration of a kriya in Akshara kala.
- **Kriya:** It is a measure to count time.
- **Anga :** Part or Limb.
- **Graha:** Describes where the song commences, which may not be at the beginning of tala.
- **Jathi :** type or kind. It describes variations in Anga (Laghu).
- **Kala:** Denotes the number of matras in which kriya is subdivided.
- **Laya:** Time gap between two consecutive kriyas. It sets the tempo.
- **Yathi:** rhythmic pattern in composition with reference to anga.
- **Prasthara:** detailed elaboration of rhythmic pattern.”[3]

### Need for Tala in Music

Some scholars have stated that music without tala or anibaddha sangitha is Aranyaka Sangita i.e. Music of the Forest and Nibaddha Sangita or Music with tala is the Music of the society. It is stated that Music without tala makes the listener listless i.e. does not invigorate or stimulate the listener. Listening to free music for a long time makes the listener dull. In the ‘alapas’ of the Dhruvada or Khayal, which are without tala, the aphorism that the art which unites with the supreme Bliss like the soul is the Greatest Art is not realized. Perhaps it is for this reason that it is stated that the beat on the Tabla or Mridangam indicates the end of anibaddhata as at the point where there is the concord of tala text and note, the appreciator’s mind becomes jubilant and exhilarated. The approving nod of the singer or the accompanist gets the empathy of the listeners.

In music, metre and tala respectively provide dynamism to the notes. The measurement of time is called tala as referred to in Amarakosa-‘talah Kalakriyamanam’ (tala is the measure of action). Tala binds music by definite rules and restrictions of time. Just as the lack of definite time sequence in life leads to a lack of happiness and prosperity, so too music without tala makes it meaningless and ineffective. Tala develops the various styles of presentation, by which the regulations of music are maintained. “Tala disciplines music and entices the audience by its organized form, stability, and outstanding qualities. It is because of tala that it has become necessary to preserve ancient and modern music with the help of a system of notation.

The sequential ascent, and descent of Indian music becomes very effective as a result of the definite pace of the tala. By bringing our differences in the tempo of the tala, emotional appeal is created. Different tempos of tala are of great significance for portraying sorrow, erotic sentiment, fierceness, disgust. In “Sangeetha Rathnakara” and “Naradartha Ragamala”, in the following verses, it is stated, just as in the bod, face is the most important and just as in the face the nose is the most important part, music without tala is like a face without a nose. Song, instrumental music and dance are compared to an intoxicated elephant and tala is compared to the rod which is used for controlling the elephant.”[4]

‘Sri Narahari Chakravarthy says that music without tala is like a boat without a captain. Therefore, music without tala is impure music.’ There are no definite examples of Desi Sankeerna Talas but there are mentions of 101,108,120 talas. The time of Sangita Ratnakara is the Golden Age of tala and 120 talas are mentioned and discussed.

“Tala is described in the following way, in some granthas. “Tala is like the body of a man in which matras (beats) are like the arteries, laya is like blood flowing in them. Strokes are like the various limbs”. There are any number of varieties of talas both in Carnatic as well as the Hindustani systems of music. The few important and more popular talas of both systems are given below.”[5]

	Carnatic		Hindustani
1.	Adital	1.	Ektal
2.	Madhya Adi tal	2.	Choutal
3.	Jampa tal	3.	Jhaptal
4.	Tripata tal	4.	Deepchandi
5.	Rupaka tala	5.	Dadra
6.	Matya tal	6.	Dhamar
7.	Dhruva tal	7.	Trital
8.	Ekatalam	8.	Tilwada

**Table: 4** Comparison of Tals in Carnatic and Hindustani

Tala is the rhythmic groupings of beats:

These rhythmic cycles range from 3 to 108 beats. It is the theory of time measure and has the same principle in Hindustani and Carnatic music, though the names and styles differ. The musical time is divided into simple and complicated metres. Tala is independent of the music it accompanies and has its own divisions. It

moves in bars, and each beat in it is divided into the smallest fraction. Tala is the most important aspect of classical music, and it can be considered to be the very basis or pulse of the music. Different talas are recognized like Dadra, Rupak, Jhaptal, Ektal, Adha-Chautal and Teen-Tal. There are over a 100 Talas, but only 30 talas are known and only about 10-12 talas are actually used. The most commonly encountered one is the one with sixteen beats called the teentaal. The Laya is the tempo, which keeps the uniformity of the time span. The Matra is the smallest unit of the tala. Carnatic music has a rigid thala structure. The thalas are defined on the basis of intricate arithmetic calculations. Thalal always occur in a cyclic pattern. "The thalas are made up of three basic units, namely, laghu, drutam and anu drutam. The time unit of laghu varies according to the "jaati". Depending on the jaati of laghu we get 35 thalas. It is again possible to split each time unit or beat into five "ghatis". This leads to  $35 \times 5 = 175$  thalas in Carnatic music."<sup>[6]</sup> The most common thala is the Adi (first, foremost) thala, which consists of a repeating measure of 8 beats. Thalal are also associated with moods just like the ragas.

### **Tala and its relation with the various aspects of life**

The birth of metre in poetry and tala in music would have been in a normal way. The primitive man must have experienced tala in the sound of the following of the rivers, in the eternal flowing of the water in the waterfall, in the orderly sunrise and sunset, in the cycle of seasons. It is the pace of these time intervals that have assumed the form of metre in literature and have become tala in music and breathed life into music. With the rise of civilization, the ecstasies of jubilant moods were expressed in dance. The savage men used to kill animals and dance with joy when eating them. In different periods of history, musicians enriched the notes and poets enriched literature with the use of various styles and forms of poetry.

"The entire universe is bound by rhythmic movement. In daily life, men, animals and birds, static and dynamic beings – all perform their activities with a particular routine. Though time itself is a whole, it is divided into hours, divisions of the day, days, months and years."<sup>[7]</sup>

### **The Science of tala**

"The Indian science of rhythm has its roots in the music of the Vedic time. It has evolved from ancient

times to the present day and is very rich in its rhythmic patterns. In a music concert, it is essential for a mridangist to be well-versed in the science of tala, as mridangam is a pradhana tala vadya (prominent rhythmic instrument)."<sup>[8]</sup>

Tala can be defined as the musical measure of time and it regulates the rhythm present in music. With tala, musical compositions get a definite form of presentation. The intricacies of rhythm in a tala enhances the bhava of the composition. Further, rhythmic music can be recorded and preserved in the form of notation for the benefit of posterity.

Shruthi and Laya are the essential ingredients of music. The well-known Sanskrit aphorism defines shruthi as the mother and laya as the father.

The above aphorism emphasizes that a musician should play equal attention to the aspect of shruthi and laya, as these two are the basic requisites of good music. The aspect of shruthi and laya in music is based on intuition and a performance by a musician, gifted with a sound knowledge of shruthi and laya will be a highly balanced one.

"There is a subtle difference between tala and laya. Laya can be defined as the interval of time between the beats or the angas of a tala and tala is a cycle of rhythmic pattern. In other words, laya is present in a tala cycle. Further, laya regulates the tempo of the musical composition and lends scope to the musician as well as an accompanist on mridangam to embellish the rendering within a definite time sequence and the effect of this time bound spontaneous creative presentation is ecstatic."<sup>[9]</sup>

### **The Concept of tala in Music**

"Tala is a technical word customarily meaning a series of sounds which are produced on a percussion instrument covered by any animal skin with the help of striking by the palm. The percussion instruments are many in number, for example, Dundubhi, Mridanga, Khol, Pakhawaj, Tabla (Cymbals, Bells) etc. We do not propose to enter into the historical issue of the origin and development of a focus on the concept of tala with special reference to the table. The reason is obvious. In modern times table happens to be the most popular and most widely used as the accompanying percussion instrument by the musicians of North India."<sup>[10]</sup> Tala has a couple of functions: (a) to accompany music (whether vocal or instrumental) or

dance, and (b) to express its own rhythm to focus on (a) as mentioned above, the reason being the same as before. When we speak of music in the context of tala, we have in mind classical Indian Music as in vogue in North India or in short Hindustani music. There are varieties of classical Hindustani music, namely, Dhrupad, Dhamar, Kheyal, Tappa, Thumri, and so on in the side of instruments we have music as played on Sitar, Sarode, Violin, Flute, Esraj. Sehnaï and so on. Our focus would be on Kheyal and on a variety of instrumental music.

### Tala System

“The tala system is perhaps the most difficult and complicated branch of south Indian music. There is no comparison to it in the other musical systems of the world. The time measures used by all the innumerable varieties of rhythm used in South Indian music.

The development of tala mnemonics and the art of drumming have contributed to the development of the tala system. It should be remembered, that when a mridangam player accompanies a musician in India, he does not merely beat the sarva laghu, but provides a across-rhythmical accompaniment based on the style, movement and rhythmical construction of the pieces rendered. This ‘rhythmical harmony’ provided by the mridangam player contributes to the excellence of a concert of Indian Music.”<sup>[11]</sup>

### Changes in the tempo of the tala and the creation of the various sentiments (Rasa-nispatti)

The appropriate sentiments cannot be created in music without musical notes and tala especially without the tempo. When lord Siva was inspired by Rudra rasa, he must have done the Tandava Nrithya and compulsorily various tempos of tala must have been used. From ancient times the creation of the heroic sentiment has been possible only by differences in the tempo of the tala. In other words, creation of rasa is not possible unless the tempo of the tala is varied suitably just as in literature various sentiments are depicted through the use of various metres, and the music composer resorts to various talas and thus is able to depict various sentiments. When the music began to be combined with the visual performing arts such as drama, mine, and mono acting, then the tempo of tala did not have the necessity of svaras. Sometimes for the creation of sentiments, a scene of a fearful dark night is depicted by producing various sounds by beating percussion instruments softly or loudly on a stage wherein the

scene of a dark night is shown. In flow Dance and Flow Music, Adivasis depict rasa by varying the tempo of the tala percussion instruments because in the song or the dhuna there is hardly any change in the notes. “Many standard Sanskrit works on music have chapters devoted to tala. Such works as tala lakshana. Tala vishaya, tala uvdhana, tala samudra, tala dipika, tala mahodhati and tala lakshana sangraha treat of tala alone. Works like Suddhananda prakasam, raga tala prastara and raja tala chintamani deal with the subject of tala at length. There are references to tala in non-sangita literature like the Silappadikaram, Pattuppattu, Kalladam, and Purananuru.”<sup>[12]</sup>

### Chapu tala

“The chapu tala is one of the measures used in Indian music from very early time. This belongs to desi sangita. There are many folk melodies in this tala. It is a syncopated time measure and is counted with two beats. Sometimes for the sake of convenience, instead of two beats, it is reckoned with a best and a visarjita.

### There are four varieties of chapu tala:

1. Tisra chapu (1+2=3), where the duration of the first beat is one unit of time and the second, two.
2. Kanda chapu (2+3=5), where the duration of the first beat is two units of time and the second, three.
3. Misra chapu (3+4=7), where the first beat has a duration of three units of time and the second, four.
4. The Sankerna chapu (4+5=9), where the duration of the first beat is four units and the second, five.”<sup>[13]</sup>

### Tani avartanam (mridangam solo)

The tani avartanam is the highlight of an Indian concert. It generally takes place following the main kriti, usually in the middle hour of the concert. It is the melodic soloist who decides to give the drummer a chance to solo, and generally, it is not the choice of the drummer, although the situation may vary. Therefore, a drummer must be prepared to play a solo in any tala that is given. Sometimes one is asked to play a solo in one of the complicated talas, and perhaps also in a very uncomfortable tempo laid down by the principal performer. The tala of the kriti, the main piece, is the tala in which the drum solo is played. The focal point in the tala cycle is the pickup of the krithi, or any

section of the krithi for the matter, which has been stressed and elaborated upon by the main performer with niraval and swarakalpana.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Conclusion

Music without tala and laya stimulates the listener. It can be in any music such as folk, Indian classical music (Hindustani & Carnatic is must), film music, devotional songs etc., We should listen to good music and understand the tala and laya sense. For some people it is easy to understand the tala system but, for some, it's not. We should train the people who are not able to get the tala sense. In the ancient Gurukula system, when Gurus trained the students, repetition of the cycle of the tala, of the slow, medium, and fast had a definite pattern and significance. Hence, tala had a dominant status as it stabilized music by its restraint. It is the pace of these time intervals that have assumed the form of meter in literature and have become tala in music and breathed life into music. There are some stages to learning the talas, primarily starting with the basic tala known as Adi tala. Gradually, we can increase the stage of developing the tala system. Basic is the foundation of one tala. We can learn many talas but the clarity of one tala should be perfect. All the talas are not important for practical purposes but some talas, specifically Adi, Roopaka, Misra Chapu, and Khanda Chapu are very important for concert performing and solo performances.

In general, it is good to know the tala systems like Maarga talas, Desi talas, 108 talas, 175 talas, and 72 mela talas, etc., These talas are very important in theoretical purposes like research, competitive exams (NET National Eligibility Test), etc., It is also important for further studies. While performing in concert, we have to observe the tala. While in solo performances we have to maintain kalapramanam. It is very important for percussionists. We should listen to the artists while accompanying and performing a solo. Then we can understand the essence of the weightage of tala. In conclusion of this topic 'Tala and its significance we can observe more preference for the tala systems in a practical way as well as theoretical way. It is most important to note this verse "Shruthi Mata Laya Pitah" the Sanskrit verse defines shruthi as the mother and laya as the father. It means musicians should pay equal attention to the aspect of shruthi and laya, as these two are the basic requirements of good music.

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