

Tabla playing style by Ustad Manju Khan of Ajrada

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Abstract

Ustad Manju Khan was a pivotal figure of the Ajrara “gharana” of tabla playing and held a distinctive place in the world of the instrument. His performance style blended the traditional elements of the Ajrara school with his own unique characteristics. The ability to move forward by preserving tradition while incorporating qualities of modern performance is the hallmark of an accomplished tabla player. This research article attempts to conduct a meticulous study of Ustad Manju Khan’s playing style, examining every intricate aspect of his artistry.

The style of Tabla playing involves a synthesis of various elements. To understand a player’s style, a detailed analysis of factors such as sitting posture, hand placement, body language, facial expressions, the balance between the “Bayan” and “Dayan”, the positioning of the instruments, the approach to solo and accompaniment, sound production (“Nikas”), the aesthetic quality of the “Bols” (syllables), and the style of improvisation (“Badhat”) is essential....

Keywords Hand Position, Sitting and Facial Posture, Sound Beauty and Development, Performance of Sama and Taali Khaali, Grasp in Other Gharanas, Rules and the style of “rela” progression, Ustad Manju Khan’s “tabla” accompaniment style

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive and analytical methods have been employed in this research.

Books, research papers, and reliable online sources were utilized for data collection.

A comparative study of the collected material was conducted to analyze the key points.

Cross-referencing was also carried out during the research process to ensure the veracity of the facts.

The entire study has been presented in a logical sequence to allow the conclusions to emerge clearly.

An attempt was made to understand the depth of the subject through the systematic classification of the gathered information.

Expert opinions and available evidence were also drawn upon as needed during the research.

Hand placement

Hand placement is a crucial aspect of tabla playing. The foundation of this technique is laid the moment a guru first guides a student’s hand onto the instrument. Consequently, tabla experts believe that this initial placement has the power to either elevate the student’s artistry to a new dimension, render it merely ordinary, or distort it entirely. While hand placement varies according to the style of each “gharana” (school), the ideal technique is one that enables the player to execute and present the “baaj” (playing style) of any “gharana” in its authentic manner. Manju Khan was introduced to the tabla in his childhood by his uncle, Ustad Azizuddin Khan. Khan Sahib’s right hand would rest on the tabla in a rounded posture; his index finger exerted significant weight, while the middle finger remained mostly lifted off the surface, and the ring finger stayed in an ideal position—touching the edge of the “syahi” (the black central patch). His little finger remained close to the ring finger.

The thumb plays a crucial role in the balance of the hand. It greatly facilitates the independent movement of the other four fingers. The thumb maintains contact with the “gajra” (the braided rim of the drumhead). Specifically, Khan Sahib’s thumb would touch the “gajra” at a point aligned with the middle section of his index finger. This specific hand positioning is achieved through a guru’s blessings, divine grace, and years of rigorous practice. Such positioning ensures that playing complex compositions at high speeds causes no strain or deformity in the hand.

The positioning of the left hand is vital in “tabla” playing. Factors such as tilting the “bayan” (bass drum) slightly forward or keeping it upright, the orientation of the “syahi” (black central patch), and whether the drum is played

at a lower or higher pitch all contribute significantly to the aesthetic quality of the performance. Producing various forms of “gamak” (oscillation) and “meend” (glissando) by applying weight to the “dagga” (bass drum) with the left hand is a significant art form. Ustad Manju Khan Sahib preferred to keep the “bayan” upright rather than tilted. He positioned the “syahi” facing his body, leaving the wider section beyond the “syahi” accessible for playing with his fingers.

Khan Sahib divided the left-hand fingers into two groups: the index finger on one side, and the middle, ring, and little fingers on the other; he would alternate between these two groups while playing the “dagga”.

Techniques on the “bayan”—such as “gamak”, “meend”, and “ghissa” (sliding the hand across the drumhead)—play a key role in evoking “Veer” (heroic), “Shringar” (romantic), and “Raudra” (furious) “rasas” (emotions). Khan Sahib applied weight to the “bayan” using both his shoulder and his palm; the coordination between these two resulted in a remarkably melodious performance. Even a single stroke of “Dha” demonstrated his command over the instrument and the perfect synchronization of both hands. By varying the weight applied during “gamak” and “meend” on the “bayan”, he evoked diverse emotional moods. Khan Sahib created extraordinary sweetness in his music by modulating the pressure on the “bayan” and precisely controlling the “bols” (syllables).

Sitting and Face Posture -

There are mainly two asanas suitable for tabla playing:

1. Padmasana means sitting cross-legged.
2. Virasana means sitting on the knees

Maintaining the right posture for playing the tabla and the maintenance of the hands are closely related. Even if we expect all these things, its side effect comes to us when we are unable to play the lyrics on the tabla at a fast pace and soon become frustrated.

Therefore, for the softness, sweetness, lightness, purity and attractiveness of the characters, the right posture should be chosen first.ⁱ

To play the tabla, one should sit cross-legged or in Veerasana because playing the tabla requires the use of hands. Therefore, all the asanas in which the force of the hands can be applied will be suitable.ⁱⁱ

Dr. According to Manohar Bhalchandraro Marathe, Practice should be done by sitting directly on the shoulders of the body. So that the playing can feel simple and the lyrics can get the right weight. The meeting also has an impact on the audience.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ustad Manju Khan used to wear a round cap and his attire was sometimes plain and sometimes colorful. When Khan Sahab used to come on stage with a shawl over a kurta pyjama, the audience was attracted to him. Ustad Manju Khan's meeting shows that the face posture is an important role during the fluctuations of the rhythm and the even-filled lyrics while playing. When the player reaches the level after the intense rhythm, the facial expressions add to the even. When the rhythm is difficult or over-prepared, the harmony of hand and mouth posture makes the playing more beautiful.

The coordination of Ustad Manju Khan's hands and face posture was a sight to behold. There was a slight smile on his face while playing. His gestures were effortless even when he played the most difficult rhythms and fast movements. Even while doing difficult work, he never made a crooked face or a distorted posture. Since tabla is an auditory and visual art, Khan Sahab used to sit in front of the mirrors and practice. As soon as he came to the level, Khan Sahib used to strike his left hand the left with a smile and raise his hand backwards.

Sound Beauty & Exhaust

Music is created by sound and sound is its life. Just as paintings are made from colour, idols are made from clay or stone and palaces are made from brick and stone, in the same way, music is produced from sound.^{iv} In the tabla, musical sounds are produced by the combination of sounds produced from the right and left. The more subtle and intuitive this sound is, the more juice will be produced. "The standard weight of the closed or open vocals produced at different positions on the right and the left is called the weight of the standard difference in the instrument in both the notes."^v

The outpouring of Ustad Manju Khan's lyrics was unmistakably melodious. Khan Sahib's Na, Ta, Teen Strike had an accurate sound. Khan Sahab used to emphasize on the clarity and sweetness of the lyrics along with preparation,

he said that preparation comes, but cleanliness and sweetness take time, it should be worked on first. Khan Sahib used to play difficult vocal groups in medium or slow tempo for a long time, he said that this was the only way to master difficult lyrics. Khan Saheb had done a lot of work on the left tabla, he had done good meditation on mind, smell and ghissa. For this reason, his playing sounded sweet, there was more glimpse of heroic sentiment in Khan Sahib's playing, but where soft work was needed, Khan Saheb used to play very light and sweetly.

Elimination of even and clap blanks

Sam Tali Khali is very important in Hindustani classical music. Especially in tabla playing, sam is of great importance, the extreme of any composition, law, rela or past is the same. If you miss the even, then all the effort is in vain. In this, the opposite goes through the intense rhythm and the more accurately it comes to its place, the more wonderful and bliss it gets. Khan Sahab had an amazing grip on the even, he always stayed in the rhythm and reached the even very accurately every time, sometimes the wave would go back and forth, yet he would catch the even. According to Khan Sahab, the tabla player should handle the ups and downs of the rhythm himself, but he must come right on time.

Ustad Manju Khan took full care of the blanks of the rules and the relays, the beauty of the playing is made from the clapping, just as there is a rhyme of two lines or four lines in a poem. This aspect of Khan Sahab being strong makes this element of his playing stronger and strengthens his musical side.

Grip on other houses

Ustad Manju Khan was a good player of Delhi, Azrara and Farrukhabad Baaz, he had good authority over these instruments as well. Khan Sahab used to play the rules of Farrukhabad and Lucknow in addition to the prevailing rules of Delhi. In Khan Sahib's laws, there was a lot of use of Dhatrak Ghikit Kaddhati, Dhagetit, Bol groups. The rare laws of Ajrada such as 'Ghidanag Dhindhage Nagedhin Dhaage Dhagenadha Trakadhin Dhaegatraka Dhinagina Dhagege Nagedhin Dhagenagha Trakadhin Dhagetrak Tinakina' were also played by Khan Saheb with preparation and with a good expansive edge. Another Ajrada law is 'Ghadha Ghegheng Dhindheena Ghegheng.' This is also one of the rare and best rules of Ajrada, this rule was also presented by Khan Saheb in the programs and taught to the students. Farrukhabad's Rela Qaeda Dhaagetir Kitgege Tirkit Dhingin Dhaage Tir Kitdheghe Nanagin Tinkin Khan Saheb used to play this Rela Qaeda clearly and in preparation.

The prevailing rule of three rhythms in Delhi, "Dhati Tadha Dhadha Dhaage Tina Gina", was made with a clear edge and two finger tips. To play this rule, it takes softness in the hand, which Khan Saheb used to do very well. Khan Sahab used to say that Delhi is not just 'Dhati Dhaage, Nadha Tirkit' is over, there are many other good laws of Delhi. He had more than one composition, Khan Saheb used to add charm to the beauty of the lyrics of the Delhi Gharana.

Khan Sahib's tabla was soft as well as loud, his vigor in the past parans and fardos was a sight to behold. He was unparalleled in presenting the heroic sentiments.

Laws, Rayleigh's Edge Estimates

The style of the bandish and the style of the trio The artistic and effective presentation of compositions tied in different rhythms in independent playing is the most important part of the art of tabla playing. The solo playing of the tabla is a blend of all these elements, including the offering, the law, the rela, the rau, the gat, the paran and the piece. It is imperative to analyse every element in order to study one's playing style in detail. Ustad Manju Khan often began her performances with a peshkar from Delhi or Ajrara. With the influx of small rhythms, he would come to the level and present the first three delayed beats.

After that, the peshkar began, in the middle of the peshkar, the small thirds and the amad were played in the horizontal rhythm, Ustad Manju Khan used to play the following rule of Agnarada mostly after the peshkar.

Dhatrak Dhikit Ginadha Tighina Dhatrak Dhikit Ginadhi Naakina

Tatrak Dhikkrit Kinata Tikina Dhatrak Dhikkrit Ginadhi Nagina

Ustad Manju Khan Saheb had knowledge of the prevalent rules of every gharana. Khan Saheb used to play the Qaeda first in one gun, one and a half times and then in a quadruple. They would end it with a small third after a succession of leads. Khan Saheb used to make reflexes on the basis of double, force, tactics, twists, fights.

The word 'rela' is derived from 'rail' or 'flow', which is also an expansive structure. Consistency and fast speed are the main attributes of the train. Mainly, the relays are composed in three vocal groups. Tirkait, Dhirdhir and Dhingin are the three bols that require hard work because they are played at a fast pace with consistency. Ustad Manju Khan had practiced all the three bol groups well and had a good grasp of them, so such reels of his Tirkait Dhiradhar and Dhingin were heard clear and melodious.

All these compositions are non-expansive. The works are mostly short without a third. Compositions are based on or derived from the lyrics of the paran pakhawaj. The piece or influx is a composition of small vocal groups. To play these non-expansive compositions, the hand must have all the elements of speed, weight and vigor. Khan Saheb had all these things in his hands. Apart from Farrukhabad Azrara, Punjab's compositions were also played by Ustad Manju Khan. He had the thrust in his hands, which is necessary for playing the past paran.

It is easy to be beautiful and beautiful according to the mind in the rhythm of the right and left, but it cannot be said whether it will come out clear in double and quadruple! It mainly depends on the best practice and hard work. Sometimes the track bolt plays clearly in the rhythm of the rhythm, but when playing in the fourfold rhythm, it becomes even higher. This is reflected in the playing of a well-skilled prepared tabla player. The development of other dialects The weight of the right and the left is not understood if the instrument is not listened to closely due to these systematic things.^{vi}

Ustad Manju Khan's tabla accompaniment style

The tabla accompaniment is completely different from the tabla solo itself. While in tabla solo or solo the player is completely independent he can play anything within a proper boundary, in tabla accompaniment the player accompanies completely according to the main performer. In singing, the tabla accompaniment is limited to the instrumental accompaniment. In singing, a small lift or one or two repetition pieces in the middle or any other composition is played by the tabla player. Long compositions or long trios do not adorn the singing. In contrast, instrumental accompaniment uses long compositions and long trios.

Khan Saheb mostly played and taught classical tabla, he had mastered the accompaniment of classical singing and playing, apart from this, he also had good company in light music. His Kaharwa Dadra contract was very full and the fast rhythms in it added to the gathering. Ustad Manju Khan accompanied many big artists.

Manju Khan Sahab used to accompany by understanding the nature of the artist, it is very important for the accommodator to understand the temperament of the main artist. Many singers or musicians want a direct tabla contract and many want equal work on the tabla as well, so Khan Saheb used to accompany accordingly. Khan Sahab always associated with great artists with respect. He never dominated younger or newer artists. Before starting the Sangat, he always took permission, Khan Sahib used to reduce most of the produce in the middle of the Sangat and use small thirds.

Conclusion

A thorough examination of Khan Sahab's company shows that he was not only a skilled solo tabla player but also an excellent accompanist. His tabla accompaniment used to add charm to the program. So that fellow performers should not feel uncomfortable and sing or play in a comfortable manner. Ustad Manju Khan accompanied big artists like Hariprasad Chaurasia, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, besides Khan Sahab also accompanied famous Kathak dancer Shobhana Narayan.

Ustad Manju Khan accompanied all genres of singing. Apart from classical singing, Jasraj also accompanied Ahmed Mohammad Hussain and Ghulam Ali in ghazals and Wadali Brothers in qawwali. This quality of Khan Sahab is a testimony to his versatility. Because most of the classical tabla accompaniments accompany only in classical music and the accompaniment artists of light music accompaniment only in light music, but Khan Sahab established himself as a good artist in the accompaniment of every genre.

In this way, Khan Sahib sang with all three forms of music: singing, playing and dancing. This quality of his confirms his being an all-round artist..

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