

Appreciating Hindustani Music
Dr.Lakshmi Sreeram
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture 27
The Vilambit Khayal

In the last video, we saw that broadly there are two categories of khayal compositions: that is the bada khayal and the chota khayal. And we took a look at the chota khayal or the small khayal which is composed and sung in madhya or drut laya, that is at a medium or fast tempo. We saw a variety in terms of their setting in different talas and different mukhadas. In this video, we take a look at the bada khayal or the vilambit khayal. The compositional form of vilambit khayal, sometimes often simply referred to as the vilambit, can be seen as the heart of the khayal genre. You know very simply the bada khayal or the vilambit khayal is a khayal composition that is set in a vilambit laya of teentaal or ektaal or jhaptaal etcetera. And the laya would be something like this. Suppose it is teentaal, it would be [Music]. So, that is the spacing between the matras. So, it is leisurely, it is vilambit.

And as we have seen also the ektaal vilambit tends to be even more leisurely. So, it would be like [Music]. So, that is the first 4 matras of a vilambit ektaal of a certain laya. It could be less vilambit or more vilambit depending on the performer, or the school basically. Now, like other khayals, like other khayal compositions, the text of any vilambit khayal is usually in Braj (language) and sometimes in Punjabi.

And it too has two parts, the sthayi and the antara. The sthayi, like in the chota khayal, remains in the lower and the middle ranges or the mandra and madhya saptak while the antara goes into the taar saptak.

I will now demonstrate to highlight some important aspects of the vilambit khayal and make the point that it is a pretty unique kind of composition; that is, the slow pace or the tempo of the taal, that is a very vilambit laya - it sets unique challenges for the setting of the composition in tala and we will see that how it's setting in tala is somewhat unique.

What follows is a vilambit khayal in the raag Shuddha Sarang in Vilambit teentaal composed by Ustad Khadim Hussain Khan Saheb of Agra gharana. Khadim Hussain Khan Saheb happens to be my grand guru in the sense that both my gurus, Pandit Vasant Rao Kulkarni and Babanrao Haldankar were disciples of Khan Saheb. And so, I do trace my lineage in the Agra gharana to this Ustad.

The text of the composition is a supplication, it is a prayer to the Sufi Saint Nizamuddin Auliya asking for his grace. The text is like this.

Naiyaa mori paara karo tum hazarata nizamuddin auliya

And the antara goes like this

Apne sajana para mehara ki nazara rakho

Tum ho bade garib navaz.

The ancient metaphor of the boat and the challenge of crossing the bhavsagar or human existence which is compared to a journey in the ocean and it is the lord's grace that can get you across.

And this metaphor is employed here easily in the context of asking for the grace of a Sufi Saint. And the signature of the composer Khadim Hussain Khan Saheb appears in the antara or the second part of the composition that is sajan, sajan piya which was his takhallus or signature. Now, the demo will use a tabla app, so that the taal setting is clear. This is, as I said, in vilambit teentaal of 16 matras. The mukhda is naiyaa mori paara with the sam on paa [Music] - the sam falls on that word paara. Do take a listen.

[Music] [Music]. The vilambit khayal has an interesting relationship with the tala and this can be explained in terms of an ancient distinction between nibaddha and anibaddha sangeet. Now, nibaddha sangeet or nibaddha music is music which is bound, it is baddha it is bound, it could be bound in tala or it could have you know it could be bound in text etcetera. And then, we have music that is not tied down by anything. It is not bound into a structure by any consideration like rhythm or text. It is free and it is called anibaddha. And historically music making has involved the coming together of nibaddha and anibaddha sangeeth which is something like coming together of composition and improvisation we can say, but not quite. It is not the same distinction.

Now, how is a song bound in tala that is, how is it, what can its relationship with the tala be? There are several layers, several levels at which this relationship works. Now, a song can be and is always contained in a certain number of avartanas of the tala and that is a very fundamental way the song can be nibaddha. It is bound, it unfolds within a certain number of avartanas or tala cycles.

But it can be and usually is more in the sense that the parts of the song - that is the syllables, the text, these are held in place by the units of the tala. That is, the song is bound in tala by the syllables of the text and the matras of the tala coming together and creating a pulse as it were. So, if for instance any song - simple rhymes like ba ba black sheep, this is a very very basic way and you can see the pulse, right. So, the beat and the syllable coincide, right.

So, this is where the feel of the, I mean we can feel the tala and the matras while the song is unfolding as much as the melody itself. That is also very much part of the experience of the song. And many kinds of song and music are tied down or bound in tala in this manner - that is, beats and pulses are very much part of the song, they are woven into the song.

Now, the khayal as a composition in general and the vilambit in particular, do not exhibit this kind of relationship with the tala, this kind of being bound in tala. There is a certain looseness in this respect. Of course, khayal compositions all unfold or are contained within a certain number of avartanas of one or the other tala, but they do not exhibit what may be called a syllabic relationship with tala. They do not have this additional level of being bound in tala. To make this clear I will demonstrate again with the same vilambit khayal.

First, I will sing it in a manner where there is this more direct and simple relationship of the bandish with the tala when most syllables of the bandish coincide with the matra of the taal [Music]. [Music].

This is not how we sing it. It is more, as I said, the matras and the syllables of the song keep missing each other. [Music] [Music] [Music]. While rendering the vilambit, we strive for a seamless experience by letting the matras of the tala slip in between the syllables of the text or in other words we weave the composition into the tala cycle, but without latching on to every matra.

Of course, landing on the sam using the mukhda is imperative and most musicians also acknowledge another point in the song text that must coincide with a matra in the middle of the cycle. Here for example, in this composition Nizamuddin the ddin falls on the khali, that is a 10th matra. This is something that is also part of the structure of the composition as I learnt it.

But apart from these two points that is the sam and another matra in the middle of the cycle, generally the composition will glide between the matras, so that there are very very few places where the syllable of the composition and the matra actually come together. So, most matras of the tala cycle will slip between the text syllables so that they are not highlighted or as I said we can say that the syllables of the text fall in between the matras of the tala except at the sam where it is absolutely essential that the syllable of the song and the matra come together with precision.

And also because the other syllables fall between the matras and are not accentuated the landing on the sam is more accentuated. That coming together of the text of the song and the taal cycle is felt more intensely because elsewhere in most other parts of the composition this kind of coming together is not found.

And because it is not set very tightly or very precisely or very rigorously in taal with a determination of where each syllable falls in the tala cycle, there is a certain looseness to the vilambit khayal and each time it is rendered there is likely to be very slight, subtle changes. It is more like the sthayi or the antara is stretched to fill the avartan.

In fact, the expression used is sthayi bharna, it is to fill out the sthayi. In contrast, in the case of Dhrupad or carnatic compositions, these compositions are bound more tightly in tala, they are more what would be called syllabic. So, the vilambit khayal challenges the nibaddha anibaddha distinction in an interesting way. It is in tala, but is not tied down to it like a... it is not bound in it to the extent that a carnatic krithis or even a dhrupad composition is.

If you think of the meeting points of the syllables of the composition with the tala matras as stitches or tacks then there are very few tacks. So, it gives a seamless experience. In fact, this is a very good metaphor. Now, what is a seam? We speak of seamless experience. So, what is the seam? It is where two pieces of fabric are brought together and stitched together. Now, here we have the composition; we have the composition and the taal theka. They are brought together in the khayal rendition, but there are very few stitches or tacks. So, there is a seamless quality to the vilambit, because there are very few places where the syllable of the bandish has to fall on the matra of the taal. The tala and the bandish run parallel as it were, meeting only at a few points, necessarily at the sam.

So, this is actually a subtler relationship. It is not unconnected to the tala, absolutely not.

There is definitely a certain awareness, the tala flow is reflected in the way the vilambit unfolds. But that is a subtler relationship - not one where the syllable and matra just come together. It is, as I said, there is very much a connection, but it is subtler.

Now, the second part of the vilambit composition is called antara like in the chota khayal - and during performance, usually, what happens is the sthayi is presented and then there is a lot of improvisation or what is called rag vistar around it. And after that, usually when the tara Sa or the upper Sa is explored and you hit the tara Sa, after that the antara is rendered.

So, typically, the composition as a whole is not rendered together. There is the sthayi and antara are separated ah considerably, except in one school the Atrauli Jaipur where the sthayi and antara are rendered together fully before they embark upon vistar or improvisation.

So, the bandish we just heard naiyaa mori paara karo in shuddha sarang in vilambit teentaal, it was a prayer to the Sufi Saint Nizamuddin Auliya. There are many other themes and other

talas of course, in the vilambit khayal. So, let us just have a sample of these. First we take raag Miyan Malhar. Malhar is usually a celebration of rains, it is associated with the season of monsoon and compositions in these ragas - Malhar is also a family right; it is a type, it is Malhar ang, Malhar prakar or many kinds of Malhar ragas.

So, compositions in these ragas often describe the monsoon and in fact, it is also believed that singing a Malhar properly can even bring down the rains; it can cause a downpour. Now, in a twist to this traditional association of Malhar with the presence of rains Pandit Kumar Gandharva has composed a vilambit khayal which bemoans the absence of rains.

The text goes like this

Kaare mehaa barasata nahi

It is: dark clouds come and pass without giving rains. This is a common experience in the drier parts of the country. The text is like this [Music]. This is the sthayi, dark clouds pass without giving rain green stalks have all dried up despair all around. This is in vilambit ektaal. Typically, as I said, vilambit ektaal is rendered at a much slower pace than vilambit teentaal [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music].

Now, let us look at another theme, another kind of laya in vilambit a composition in raag Nand. Here the laya is much faster than the previous vilambit. It is still called vilambit only. This is also vilambit teentaal. Let us listen to the sthayi.

Raag Nand. This is...we call it vilambit teentaal. It is a little fast vilambit. [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music].

This is actually a description of the innocence and charm of a young groom and bride, which is actually a common theme in khayals. You find many compositions that describe the situation of marriage you know, typically, the beauty and the charm of the bride and the groom.

Now, we have seen a composition in devotion, another about rains or absence of rains, about young brides and grooms. Now, we look at love, shringara. In this bandish, the nayika, the heroine - it is in the voice of a woman and she is pining for her lover. This is in the raag Multani and again in ektaal, vilambit ektaal. She says

Mori sudha leho bega tuma aana more gunavanta balawanta.

you have taken away my sanity [Music], come quickly to me. Then the antara says your gunidas has gone mad.

That is bhayo hai baawaroo ab tumaro Gunidas

Kachu soojhata naahi more pran piya

Your "Gunidas" has gone mad and knows not what to do, so come quickly my piya pran.

Now, this is a composition of Pandit Jagannathbuwa Purohit who also is my grand guru.

Pandit Vasantao Kulkarni was also a disciple of Pandit Jagannathbuwa Purohit and Jagannathbuwa Purohit was one of the most highly regarded vaggayakaras of the 20th century and his takhallus or signature was Gunidas. And here, as you would have noticed in the antara the signature is there [Music], but there is also the signature pran piya.

Here it is not a signature, it is a reference to Vilayat Hussain Khan Saheb who was the guru of Jagannathbuwa Purohit. So, in this bandish and in many of his, most of his other bandishes, Jagannathbuwa Purohit gives expression to his own yearning to be with his guru. It is like he is singing to his guru. In fact, this is a very famous guru-shishya relationship that has been captured in compositions.

And we have other instances too, including compositions composed in response to an earlier one, as a reply to or a take on the idea expressed in an earlier composition.

So, khayal compositions are not just abstract compositions to capture a facet of a raga which they necessarily are, but they are also rooted in lived experiences and feelings of the

composers, rooted in the community of musicians and connoisseurs. Composers call out to each other, respond to each other, throw challenges, accept them and so on in these compositions.

Mori sudha leho in Multani and vilambit ektaal. [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music].

We also have vilambit khayals set in jhaptal and rupak though these are of much shorter time spans. The duration between matras is much shorter than ektaal or even teentaal. So, this is a composition in vilambit jhaptal of 10 matras. And actually this is a composition in dhrupad repertoire which has been adapted and repurposed by khayal singers. Tuma raba tuma saaheb

This is the first line of the composition and this has been memorably rendered by Pandit Bhimsen Joshi.

This is in raag Brindavani Sarang and a link to his performance of this composition, of a Brindavani Sarang around this composition is given below. Please do listen to it. [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music].

Let us also look at a vilambit rupak composition in the raag Hindol. The composition is a description of Holi. [Music] [Music] [Music] [Music].

So, the mukhada starts on the 4th beat actually, 2 3 [Music]. But we always vary it all the time. It could even start on the 5th beat or even the 6th beat. So, [Music] 7; 1 2 3 4 [Music].

So, I started on the 5th. Now, I could even start on the 6th, 5 [Music]. So, when I present, when I do the vistaar, the mukhda can be taken at various places, the sam of course, has to fall on the baSANTa [Music] San - that is not negotiable; you cannot change that. But the mukhada, where you start, how you start it, that is all very variable [Music].

So this was a brief look at the vilambit khayal which, as I said, is a very unique kind of composition and we also looked at a few themes in these compositions and we had a sample of vilambit khayals in different talas. In the next video, we will look at some other kinds of composition that are used in Khayal, that is Khayal the genre.

We have looked at chota khayal and bada khayal which are the primary compositional forms that are used in Khayal the genre, but there is one other very prominent, commonly encountered form which is the tarana. We will take a look at that very quickly in the next video.