

Kirtan and Tabla Classes: Music Theory Notes and Vocabulary

Kalaa – art

Kalaakar – artist/musician

Sangeet – music

Gayak – singer

Tabalchi – tabla player

Kirtan (keertan) – devotional/religious music

Gurbani kirtan – the singing of Gurbani (passages from SGGS)

Hindustani sangeet – North Indian classical music

Carnatic sangeet – South Indian classical music

Saaz – musical instrument

Sur/swar – a musical note

Shadaj (sharaj) – Sa; **Rishabh** – Re; **Gandhaar** – Ga; **Madhyam** – Ma; **Pancham** – Pa; **Dhaivat** – Dha; **Nishad** – Ni

Shudh – a 'normal' or natural note. Sa and Pa are always shudh.

Vikrit – not shudh; vikrit notes can either be komal or tivar

Komal – a flat note; it is one note/semitone lower than the shudh note. Only Re, Ga, Dha, and Ni can be komal. In written musical notation, komal notes are underlined.

Tivar – a sharp note; it is one note/semitone higher than the shudh note. Only ma can be tivar. In written musical notation, tivar notes have a vertical line above them.

Sargam – the notes of a composition

Alankar – a sargam for practice, or an ornament used to enhance the melody of the raag

Raag (Raga) – a musical scale with certain rules about how to use the notes, when to perform it, characteristic phrases, and a certain mood or feeling

Aroh – the ascending pattern of a raag

Avroh – the descending pattern of a raag

Vadi – the most important or strong note of a raag. It is emphasised the most. It is usually in the opposite half of the saptak as the samvadi.

Samvadi – the second most important/strong note of a raag. It is emphasised slightly less than the vadi.

Pakad (Pakar) – a characteristic short melodic phrase which defines a raag; it is possible to recognise a raag just by hearing this phrase

Rahao (Rahau) – the lines which summarise the message of the shabad being sung. It literally means ‘pause’, so we can take time to reflect on the words of the rahao line. The rahao is sung as the sthai

Sthai - chorus i.e. the main theme which is repeated and not improvised as much. Generally in the madhya saptak (middle register)

Antra – verse/stanza i.e. intermediate part which is usually sung in a higher range of notes than the sthai, focussing on taar Sa

Taan – a fast improvised phrase used to embellish the composition and show off the performer’s skills. Types = bol taan (using words/syllables), sargam taan (using note names) and akaar (using vowels)

Alaap – slow improvisational technique. Types = bol alaap (using words/syllables), sargam alaap (using note names) and akaar (using vowels)

Saptak – octave; range of notes from a certain pitch to the same note in a high or lower pitch (‘Sa to high Sa’)

Mandra (Mandar) saptak – low octave; below Sa. In written musical notation, these notes have a dot below them

Madhya (Madh) Saptak – Middle octave; between Sa and Ni.

Taar saptak – High octave, above (not including) Ni. In written musical notation these notes have a dot above them

Thaat – a method of classification of raags; every raag is classified under a thaat. Each thaat has all seven notes, which may be shudh, komal or tivar depending on the thaat.

1. **Bilaval** – All shudh.
2. **Kalyan** – Tivar Ma. Rest shudh.
3. **Khamaaj** – Komal Ni. Rest shudh.
4. **Kafi** – Komal Ga and Ni. Rest shudh.
5. **Asavari** – Komal Ga, Dha, and Ni. Rest shudh.
6. **Bhairav** – Komal Re and Dha. Rest shudh.
7. **Bhairavi** – Komal Re, Ga, Dha, and Ni. Rest shudh.
8. **Marva** – Komal Re. Tivar Ma. Rest shudh.
9. **Poorvi** – Komal Re and Dha. Tivar Ma. Rest shudh.
10. **Todi** – Komal Re, Ga, and Dha. Tivar Ma. Rest shudh.

Matra – a beat (e.g. there are 16 matras in one cycle of teentaal)

Bol – a rhythmic syllable representing the sounds of the tabla or another percussion instrument. E.g. ‘ta’ ‘tin’ ‘ghe’ ‘na’ ‘tak’ ‘ka’ ‘dha’ ‘dhin’ etc.

Lai – the tempo or speed of the music

Vilambit Lai – slow tempo

Madhya (Madh) Lai – medium tempo

Drut Lai – fast tempo

Avartan – one whole cycle of a taal

Layakari – playing with the rhythm and tempo by fitting different numbers of notes or syllables into the base tempo

Ekgun – single speed i.e. one note/bol per matra

Dugun/dwigun – double speed i.e. two notes/bols per matra

Vibhag – a section of a taal

Taali – (“clap”) found at the start of a vibhag which is emphasised/stressed. Taalis are numbered.

Khaali – (“empty”) a ‘wave’ at the start of a vibhag which is not emphasised that much. Represented by “O”

Sum – the first beat of a taal, represented by “X” if this falls on a taali

Taal – a rhythmic cycle/pattern of beats. Every taal has:

- A certain number of matras
- A sum (1st beat)
- A certain number of vibhags
- Some taalis
- Usually 1 or more khalis

Theka – the fixed base pattern of a taal

Examples of taals:

- Teentaal

16 matras divided into 4 vibhags (each vibhag has 4 matras)
3 taalis + 1 khaali

X				2				O				3			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Dha	Dhin	Dhin	Dha	Dha	Dhin	Dhin	Dha	Dha	Tin	Tin	Ta	Ta	Dhin	Dhin	Dha

- Roopak (Rupak)

7 matras divided into 3 vibhags (3 + 2 + 2 matras)
1 khaali + 2 taalis

O			1		2	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tin	Tin	Na	Dhin	Na	Dhin	Na

- Kehrva

8 matras divided into 2 vibhags (each vibhag has 4 matras)

- Dhadra

6 matras divided into 2 vibhags (each vibhag has 3 matras)

- Jhaptaal

10 matras divided into 4 vibhags (2 + 3 + 2 + 3 matras)

- Ektaal

12 matras divided into 6 vibhags (each vibhag has 2 matras)

- Deepchandi

14 matras

- Pancham savari

15 matras