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The Suspension of Rhythm - Exploring the Use of Usi (Non-beat Mode) - In Particular with Reference to the Carnation Tla System

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Abstract: ***An element of a discontinuous pattern within the paradigm of set configuration of a tāla structure, marks for a study of a distinct and unique component of a tāla, which is also within the lexicon of a conventional scheme of the tāla concoct, known as usi. The paper shall majorly explore the computation and implementation of usi, in variegated tāla patterns, specifically in the Carnatic music system. The tālas from the Sūlādi Saptatāla conglomerate or the seven tāla system shall be taken into account, for explicating the element of usi. The paper also shall include opinions of professional musicians (percussionists and vocalists) for an elaborate elucidation on how they work around the said element of usi.***

Keywords: *usi*: off-beat pattern, *tāla:* beat cycle, *saptatāla:* seven *tāla*system, *jāti:* the simple beat cycles, *laya:* speeds

1. Introduction

The basic essence of a rhythmic construe is in its continuity. However, on observing intently this continuity is infrequently interjected with a riveting constituent known as *usi*, which is an off-beat pattern, and is more than often, interpolated with the conventional construct of the *tāla* structure.

Subsequently as observed by the researcher, there might be a difference between a decision of a compulsive nature and that of an impulsive order with respect to a live performance. This research thus, might also help chart out a course in terms of the musicians being able to explain the experience of impulsively or compulsively interlacing the element of *usi* during a live performance.

The following research thus shall explore the deployment of *usi*, which is also time and again played with meticulously in a precise rhythmic design.

2. Methodology

An exploratory methodology shall be adopted for the paper. A descriptive study of the *tāla* system and an explanatory methodology with respect to the habituated terms infrequently utilized in the *tāla* system shall also find mention in the segments hereafter.

The *Saptatāla* system

The *saptatāla* concoct has been described as the principal structure of the Carnatic musical system.
'… Carnatic music are set to seven principal Tālas, i. e., Saptatala. . ' (Purecha, 111)

The seven *tālas* with their sign or *aṅgās* are as follows-
1) *Dhruva tāla*-1011
2) *Maṭyatāla*-101
3) *Rūpakatāla*-10/01
4) *Jhampatāla*-1U0
5) *Tripuṭatāla*-100
6) *Aṭṭatāla*-1100
7) *Ektāla*-1

In these seven *tālas* the sign '1' also known as *laghu*, is calculated according to the five existent *jātis*-

'It is from this7 tālas that 35 tālas are formed on the basic jātibhedās. The 5 jātis namely tiśra, catuśra, miśra, khaṇḍa, and saṅkūrṇa admits no. of 7 tālas each giving rise to 35 tālas. ' (Purecha, 111)

The *jātis* are a constituent only of the sign *laghu* in any of the above-mentioned *tāla*-

'. . Of the śaḍāṅgas, the laghu admits of jati varieties. . ' (Purecha, 116)

The *jātis*thus consist of varied beats which are as follows-
tiśra-3 beats (*ta-ki-ta*)
catuśra-4 beats (*ta-ka-dhi-mi*)
miśra-7 beats (*ta-ki-ta-ta-ka-dhi-mi*)
khaṇḍa – 5 beats (*ta-ka-ta-ki-ta*)
saṅkīrṇa-9 beats (*ta-ka-dhi-mi-ta-ka-ta-ki-ta*)

Similarly, the sign 0 is known as *dhrutam* which has a fixed calculation of two beats. The sign U known as the *anudhrutam* is fixated at one beat only. The following table shall incorporate the computation of all the *tālas* with their *aṅgas* and variegated *jātis*.

Table 1

TĀLAS	SIGN/AṄGAS	TIŚRA (3 BEATS)	CATUŚRA (4 BEATS)	KHAṆḌA (5 BEATS)	MIŚRA (7BEATS)	SAṄKĪRṆA (9 BEATS)
Dhruva	1011	3+2+3+3	4+2+4+4	5+2+5+5	7+2+7+7	9+2+9+9
Maṭya	101	3+2+3	4+2+4	5+2+5	7+2+7	9+2+9
Rūpaka	01	2+3	2+4	2+5	2+7	2+9
Jhampa	1U0	3+1+2	4+1+2	5+1+2	7+1+2	9+1+2
Triputa	100	3+2+2	4+2+2	5+2+2	7+2+2	9+2+2
Aṭṭa	1100	3+3+2+2	4+4+2+2	5+5+2+2	7+7+2+2	9+9+2+2
Ek	1	3	4	5	7	9

Thus, this marks the fundamental calculations of the *tāla* in the Carnatic music system. The musicians majorly sing and play an instrument according to these calculations. Hence these permutations and combinations hold a significant position in the entire musical structure.

The researcher shall now move on to describe the basics of an *usi* pattern. These are also principally designed to be allocated in the basic fabric of the *tāla* pattern.

The basics of an *usi* pattern

The *aṅgadhrutam* in a *tāla* structure as mentioned above, has a way of implementing the rhythmic beat of two counts. This is also known as a *kriya* or the action.

'Measuration, ways of doing, denotes beat i. e., clapping of two palms employed in reckoning the tāla. ' (Purecha, 114)

In the case of denoting *dhrutam*, the first beat is a clap with the palm facing downwards, followed by the *kriya* of turning the hand with the palm now facing upwards. The gap in between these two beats is recognized as an *usi* pattern within the structure of the *dhrutam*-

'Drutam (0)-One beat of the right palm on the lap+ one wave of hand (usi/visarjitam) …' (Kommajosyula, 1)

The wave of the hand thus marking the *usi* falls in between the first and the second clap, the second clap being the palm placed downfacing upwards. Therefore supposedly, the pattern of *usi*is already present in the above *tālas* which primarily consist of the *aṅgadhrutam.*

Another component of the *tāla* known as the *graha* or *graham* includes pattern of *usi*. *Graha* is a point from where the song begins-

'Graham is the place in a Thaalam where the song begins. This is also known as "Eduppu" which means the starting point in Tamil. ' (Nathalaya, 1)

The *graham* is divided into two parts majorly, *samam* and *visamam*out of which *visamam* is further subdivided into two-*atheetham* and *anaagatham*.

'Eduppu is of two varieties, one is "Samam" and the other is "Visamam". Samam is when a song begins at the first beat of a Thaalam and Visamam is when the song begins either before or after the stroke of the Thaalam. Vishamam is further classified into two categories… When a song has both Athitham and Anaagatham it is called 'usi'. ' (Nathalaya, 1)

Therefore, inclusion of both *athitham* and *anaagatham* designates the presence of *usi*. The entire song however is within the structure of a specific *tāla* only.

The researcher shall now move on to describe experience of a few musicians with the said element of *usi.* The following segment traverses through their implementation of the off-beat pattern.

The musicians' take on *usi*-calculation and implementation

Mr. Jayan Nair is an exquisite Carnatic vocalist and a mridangam exponent and a music composer, who was associated with the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. He has worked extensively with poignant artists such as Mallika Sarabhai and also with artists worldwide. In a brief yet insightful interview with him he explains his take on the element of *usi*.

Image courtesy: https://www.abhivyaktiart.org/artists/jayan-nair/

He says-'*usi* means off-beat'.

He goes on to explain the calculation of the *usi* in a simple interplay of a *catuśrajāti*. He mentions that instead of using a pattern of four *bols* (*shollkatus*) *ta-ka-dhi-mi*, which are ordinarily used in this *jāti*, one *usi* recitation of leaving half a beat in the beginning marks the shift of the *bols* in each column. The following table shall explain the calculation more specifically.

The ordinary *catuśra* pattern is as follows –

Table 2

ta-ka-dhi-mi	*ta-ka-dhi-mi*	*ta-ka-dhi-mi*	*ta-ka-dhi-mi*

Leaving half a beat in this pattern gives a count of two *bols* in the first columnand a shift is observed in the rest three column.

Table 3

--ta-ka	*dhi-mi-ta-ka*	*dhi-mi-ta-ka*	*dhi-mi-ta-ka*

To make it simpler, the *bols* shall be converted into numbers and the tables shall be rearranged as follows –

Table 4

1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4

Table 5

- 1-2	3-4-1-2	3-4-1-2	3-4-1-2

Thus, second table marking the calculation of the *usi* pattern.

Mr. Ananth Menon

Mr. Ananth Menon, a brilliant exponent of mridangam and a *nattuvanār* has performed in numerable musical concerts worldwide. Healso owns an institution in Ahmedabad, Mudra School of Indian Classical Dances. He also teaches varied Classical dance forms. In a detailed interview with him, he explains his take on the element of an *usi* pattern.

Image courtesy: https://in.linkedin.com/in/ananth-bhaskar-menon-82283310a
He says, '*usi* is pushing one matra'.

He goes on to mention the fact that the *usi* is also an integral part of the Indian Classical dance, specifically *Bharatanatyam*. He mentions that in any traditional piece of the repertoire, there is an interplay of various *layas* which ultimately is also a resultant of an *usi* pattern used in the performance of the basic *adavus* or the basic steps.

For example, the basic footwork in equilibrium or the *sama* position in the beginning of a piece like a *varṇam*, begins only with a single stamp i. e., in the first *laya* of the *adavu*. The frequency of these stamps resorts to an ascending pattern in the same position thus marking the second and the third *laya* of the *adavu* respectively. The stamping also maybe on the *athitham* or the *anaagatham* pattern of the music as mentioned earlier, thus marking the *usi* pattern even in the performance of a simple *adavu*.

To explore the element of *usi* in the performance of an *adavu*, the researcher shall also explain in brief the employment of the *adavus* in varied *jātis* which are also in three *layas*.

The following table shall explain the *bols* of a basic *adavu* in three *layas.*

Table 6

1st *laya*	*tai*	*ha*	*tai*	*hi*
2nd *laya*	*tai-ha*	*tai-hi*	*tai-ha*	*tai-hi*
3rd *laya*	*tai-ha-tai-hi*	*tai-ha-tai-hi*	*tai-ha-tai-hi*	*tai-ha-tai-hi*

The same table shall be rearranged in simple numbers-

Table 7

1st speed	1	2	3	4
2nd speed	1-2	3-4	1-2	3-4
3rd speed	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4

As observed form the above table, the counts keep on doubling with a change in each speed.

The above *adavu* pattern is also in a count of four beats or the *catuśrajāti* as it is observed from the four columns. If one is to insert an *usi* pattern in the same *adavu*, the employment of the *jāti* will be different. Now the same *adavu* shall be in a total count of five beat cycle (the *khaṇḍajāti*). The interplay of the counts thus change, as it shall be observed from the below table.

Table 8

1st *laya*	*tai*	*ha*	*tai*	*hi*	-
2nd *laya*	*tai-ha*	*tai-hi*	*- tai*	*ha-tai*	*hi -*
3rd *laya*	*ta-ha-tai-hi*	*- tai-ha-tai*	*hi-tai-ha*	*tai-hi-tai*	*ha-tai-hi*

To make it simpler, the table can also be rearranged in the following manner-

Table 9

1st speed	1	2	3	4	-
2nd speed	1-2	3-4	- 1	2-3	4 -
3rd speed	1-2-3-4	- 1-2-3	4-1-2	3-4-1	2-3-4

As observed, one whole beat that is left in the first speed, is consistently left in the second as well as the third speed but the time span of travelling from one beat to another reduces as the *laya* changes, thus marking the *usi* pattern specifically in the second and third *laya* in the count of the basic *adavus*.

3. Conclusion-in terms of the overall impact

The pattern of *usi* adds an element of surprise in the audience by breaking the monotony of the consistent rhythmic cycle.

'An increase in the values of emotions "Happiness" and "surprise", as well as in descriptive scales "tension", "Expressiveness", and "Amusement" occurs in the use of rhythmic variations…' (Vriksha, 1)

Mr. Jayan Nair also agrees and mentions the fact that this joy cannot be fathomed or calculated numerically, but can only be experienced. The experience of the audience through the musicians' adeptness is not of an ordinary kind. It extends beyond the tangibility of the mundane aspects.

Thus, that which is seemingly 'off' or out of sync can also be simply termed as a variation of a rhythmic construct, but the experience of the same marks an exquisite kind of joy by that which is extremely momentary, but beyond the definition of ordinary.

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