

A Comparative Study of Persian and Indian Rhythm Theory: Based on the *Tarāna-yi Surūr* — an 18th Century Kashmīrī Manuscript

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the interaction between the Persian and Indian rhythm theory as envisaged in the *Tarāna-yi Surūr* — a Kashmīrī manuscript from the 18th century. No comprehensive research on this manuscript is available although it encompasses several important traits of the interactions between the Persian and Indian music traditions. Especially, we can see many evolvments of the Indian rhythm theory which had been influenced with Persian music during the 18th century. This study considers *Tarāna-yi Surūr* as a representation of the north Indian and regional Kashmīrī music. It aims to examine the connection between the current Hindustānī music and obsolete 18th century music theory. I analysed the various rhythm cycles that appear in this manuscript. The categorisation of these rhythm cycles is unique and different from the previous Sanskrit or Persian rhythm cycle category applied in the other manuscripts. I attempted to bring about a theoretical coherence in this categorisation.

1. The Perspective

The Emergence of Hindustānī Music

The Hindu-Muslim encounter in the Indian subcontinent began in the 13th Century when the Turkic mamlūk Qutb al-Dīn Aibak (r.1206–1210) became the first sultan of Delhi. His dynasty was called the Mamlūk dynasty as he was one of the slave (mamlūk) officers of the Ghūrid dynasty (11c–1215). One of the important figures regarding music in Mamlūk dynasty was Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī (1253–1325), who was the son of Turkic father and Indian mother and has been considered the pioneer of north Indian classical music, also known as Hindustānī music. The synthesis of the Persian *maqām* and Indian *rāga*¹ has been attributed to him, along with the invention of the singing styles of *khyāl*, *tarāna*, *qawwālī* and instruments, such as the *sītār* and the *tablā*. However, this view has been contested in recent scholarship because while he wrote widely about music, not all of it is regarded as entirely his inventions.² If we look at

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1 Both are the melody theory on which Persian and Hindustānī music are improvised or composed.

2 There are several articles about Amīr Khusrau's contribution to Indian music. The most important articles are "Amīr Khusrau's Contributions to Indian Music: A Preliminary Survey" Dilip Karanth (2018) and *Ḥaẓrat Amīr Khusrau kā 'ilm-e-musīqī* (The Music Theory of Amīr Khusrau) Rashid Malik (1975). The latter is only available in Urdu.

multiple historical sources, the inventions of Hindustānī music of today happened much later period, namely during the Mughal dynasty.

The number of Iranian immigrants increased extensively in the Mughal era. As historian Muzaffar Alam points out, the political influence of Iranian bureaucracies reached its peak under the reign of the third emperor Akbar (r.1556–1605) [Alam 1998]. In the 16th-century document recording *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*, several music-related topics could be found. The author Abu'l-Fazl (1551–1602) listed 36 prominent court musicians at that time. Out of them, 22 were from India and eight from Iran or Central Asia. We can assume that the atmosphere in Akbar's court was diverse and many musicians from the different musical and cultural backgrounds socialized with each other.

The Rhythm Theory in Indo-Persian Manuscripts

The treatises of music in India were written in Sanskrit during the ancient period. However, after North India came under the Muslim rule in the 13th Century, Persian treatises on Indian music started to substitute the Sanskrit treatises.

Ghunya al-Munya was the first Persian treatise on Indian music written in 1374–5. This anonymous work was a translation of one of the most prominent Sanskrit treatises, *Saṅgītaratnākara*, which was written in the 13th-century by Śāraṅgadēva. In general, the early Persian treatises on Indian music are in between the translations or annotation of the preceding Sanskrit manuscripts. One distinct example was that of the *Lahjāt-i Sikandar Shāhī*, written under the reign of Sikandar Lodī (r.1489–1517). The author Yahyā al-Kābulī followed the structure of seven chapters in *Saṅgītaratnākara* and compared them to the music performed during his time [Nijenhuis and Delvoye 2010: 48]. It is worth mentioning that the most of the important Indo-Persian music treatises were written after 17th century, when Aurangzeb (r.1658–1707) was the Mughal emperor. The reign of Aurangzeb was labelled as the dark age of music culture because he was popularly known as an orthodox Muslim ruler who banned musical activity in his court. However, historian Katherine Schofield³ has objected to this view. Schofield stated that although the period of Akbar, Jahangīr, and Shāh Jahān has long been regarded as the golden age of “*Mughal darbari music*” (Mughal court music), only two significant works on Indian music had been written during that time. However, most of the original Persian treatise on Indian music had been written after Aurangzeb took the throne in 1658.

As far as the theory of rhythm is concerned, important works came even later. Kippen investigated the theory of rhythm in Hindustani music in 18th century North India [Kippen 2019]. He suggested that the new concept of *tāla*⁴ emerged in the treatises of 18th and 19th

3 Schofield argued that there no reliable sources existed that confirmed the character of Aurangzeb was really what it was thought of in popular and academic discourses. It was merely a creation by the political enemies [Schofield 2003].

4 *Tāla* is the rhythm theory Indian music.

century in India, and analysed some of them to reveal the innovation of the rhythm theory led by the interaction between Persian and Indian music theories. Two of the important manuscripts Kippen investigated in his thesis were the fourth treatises of the University of Edinburgh's Oriental Manuscript 585 (1787–8) and the early 19th century music treatise on *tablā*, known as *Sharḥ-i risāla-yi qawā'id-i tablā*. The Arabic rhythm theory, *īqā'*, is equated with the *tāla* theory in the former treatise. While the important concept regarding rhythm theory in this period is the *ṭhekā*, the qualitative sequence of drum strokes, varying timber, pitch, and rhythm and *khālī* (the concept of the empty beat, which had not appeared in any previous Sanskrit works) appeared in the latter treatise.

Sources and Materials

In this study, I want to focus on the 18th century Persian treatise in Kashmīr, known as the *Tarāna-yi Surūr*. The treatise has not yet been examined in the context of the theory of rhythm in North India. Kashmīr has been the borderline of Indian subcontinent and west Asian regions. Historically, there are a lot of official expeditions that were conducted by Mughal emperors.⁵ For these reasons, there had been cultural contact between Mughal and Kashmīrī elites, and the region could be assumed as an important melting pot for Indo-Persian court culture.

The *Tarāna-yi Surūr*, by Kashmīrī pandit Daya Ram Kachrū (1743–1811), can be placed in the tradition of Arab-Persian music treatises. It contains a significant amount of material extracted from 15th or 16th century Persian music treatises, such as the *Risāla-yi Karāmīya* (1582). Kachrū, a high-ranking official who worked for the Durranī dynasty, was fluent in Persian and Sanskrit, and frequently travelled between cities, such as Kābul and Srīnagar. We can assume that he had considerable knowledge of both Persian and Sanskrit, which gave him the opportunity to correct materials from former Persian and Sanskrit music treatises. A large portion of the book was seemingly fictional account irrelevant to or impractical in practical music performance. However, the book also contains lists of rhythm cycles, some written in correspondence with Persian and Indian rhythms. Therefore, it can be useful as reference material for comparative music studies of this region.

2. The Music of Kashmīr

Kashmīrī Court Music: *Ṣūfyāna Mūsīqī*

Kashmīrī court music, namely *Ṣūfyāna Mūsīqī*, has formed during the reign of Sultan Zain al-Ābidīn (r.1420–1470) in 15th century, when musicians from Iran and Central Asia came to his court. During this period, musical synthesis in Kashmīrī music had progressed. Kashmīr has been thought as a “little Iran” in India because there are so many cultural connections with Iran. *Ṣūfyāna Mūsīqī* is an inherited form of music played by musicians who are largely based

⁵ About the expeditions conducted by the Mughal emperors, see [Sharma 2017].

in and around the city of Srinagar. The photograph shows the one of the most prominent hereditary musical families, the Sāznawāz family (Photo1), who were my informants during my fieldwork in 2015.⁶



Photo1: Sāznawāz family taken by the author in September 4, 2015

We can see many Persian influences in those instruments played in this music. The dulcimer-like stringed instrument pictured second to the left is called a *santūr* and is said to have originated in Iran. However, the Iranian *santūr* is, in fact, different from Kashmīrī instrument. After the 20th century, the Kashmīrī *santūr* was modified by pioneer musicians, Shiv Kumar Sharma (1938–2022) and Bajan Sopori (1948–2022), to make it suitable for playing Hindustānī music. It is now one of the most popular string instruments in northern India. Unlike the instruments played by Sharma and Sopori, the Kashmīrī *santūr* is a simple instrument that is only played as a vocal accompaniment. The man in the centre of the photograph is holding a bowed spike lute, known as the *Saz-i Kashmīr*, which resembles the Iranian kemanche. The playing technique—especially using the left hand, which includes pressing on strings using the surface of one’s fingernail—is like that of the Indian *sārangī* [Pacholczyk 1996: 38]. We can easily trace the influence of both Indian and Iranian music culture in *Ṣūfiyāna Mūsīqī*. However, the music itself does not resemble Hindustānī music. It is an ensemble form of vocal music and there is not much improvisation and complex technical renditions, but rely on more fixed compositions of famous Sufi poets, such as Rūmī or Ḥāfiẓ.

Theoretically speaking, *Ṣūfiyāna Mūsīqī* is combination of Persian music and Hindustānī music. The theory of melody or *maqām* is associated with a west-Asian origin equivalent to the *rāga* in Indian music, while the theory of rhythm or *tāla* is also used in Hindustānī music. So, it is reasonable to compare the *tāla* in *Ṣūfiyāna Mūsīqī* and Hindustānī music.

To the best of my knowledge, *Tarāna-yi Surūr* is one of the few examples of treatises that deals with the fusion of Persian and Indian rhythm theory. An examination of this treatise could shed light on how Persian and Indian rhythm theories are integrated.

The Previous Research

The music of Kashmīr has not been extensively researched yet. While there are some field recordings of *Ṣūfiyāna Mūsīqī* [Lewiston 1976], they merely introduce the theory of the music and overlook the relationship or influence of neighbouring cultures. There are even fewer

⁶ The fieldwork, sponsored by the Japan Society for Promotion Science (JSPS), was conducted between August 17 and September 5, 2015, with the aim to interview musicians in Srinagar and film their performances.

academic studies relating to classical Kashmīrī music. The only reliable and extensive research has been conducted by the Polish ethnomusicologist, Józef M. Pacholczyk [Pacholczyk 1996], who listed 47 *maqāms* (melodic types) of *Šūfyāna Mūsīqī* and notated them using the staff notation system. His work reveals the melodic aspect of *Šūfyāna Mūsīqī* and its performance. Pacholczyk also compiled precious old recordings of this music artform by maestros and underlined the importance of its relationship to other cultures — especially the West, Central Asia, and India. French ethnomusicologist, Jean Durning, compared the Kashmīrī rhythm theory with Persian and Turkish ones in the treatises of the 14th and 17th centuries extracted nine *maqāms* to analyse its relationship with Persian melody theory called *dastgāh*. His work was the first to compare *Šūfyāna Mūsīqī* with West Asian classical music.

Although these works are relevant to this study, the theory of rhythm was not their primary focus. They also did not pay much attention to the relationship between Kashmīrī rhythm theory and the Hindustānī rhythm theory, *tāla*.

3. Comparing and Analysing the Rhythm Cycles in *Tarāna-yi Surūr*

In India, the existence of varieties of rhythm cycles can be traced to *Saṅgītaratnākara*, a 13th century Sanskrit treatise of music written by musicologist Śārṅgadēva. He listed as many as 127 different rhythm cycles using the meters of *laghu* (short), *guru* (long), and *pluta* (extra-long), as per the Sanskrit poetic meter system. In *Tarāna-yi Surūr*, however, this method of representation is replaced with onomatopoeic syllables and Persian rhythm cycles and Indian rhythm cycles are placed alongside. Moreover, Kachrū remarks on the similarities or commonalities between Persian and Indian rhythms.

Even though the number of rhythm cycles is reduced to 14, which I listed in a table 1 (page 26), the theory of categorization here is not the same as the one used in the previous Persian manuscripts on rhythm. All rhythm cycles are categorized in Persian numbers in order along with the Urdu word for rhythm cycle, *tāl* or *tāle*. This combination of Persian and Urdu words used as umbrella terms is itself the product of the confluence of Persian and Indian music culture. We cannot be sure that the categorization he used was his own invention or the one prevalent at the period. However, I do want to point out that the rhythm theory at that time in north India was in the process of fundamental evolution and his writing could be positioned as one of the important contributions to it.⁷

As I already mentioned, Kachrū noted down every Indian and Persian rhythm cycles as well as one Kashmīrī rhythm cycle. For instance, He wrote three Indian rhythm cycles, *tahte yek tāl*, *pūn tāl*, and *bantī*, and two Persian rhythm cycles, *ravānī* and *chapandāz*, under the

⁷ Other important works on this include 18th century Persian manuscript *Sharḥ-i risāla-yi qāwa'id-i tablā* and University of Edinburgh Oriental Manuscript 585/4. I got the idea of the process of fundamental evolution on Indian rhythm from the work of James Kippen.

muleh tāl. In this manner, he individually compares Indian and Persian rhythm cycles.

However, he does not present any consistency when describing the rhythm cycles. For example, some rhythm cycles, such as *muleh tāl*, or those listed after *shesh tāle*, are not described in detail. A few rhythm cycles such as *se tāle*, *chahār tāle*, and *panj tāle* are those described in detail. Therefore, I shall write about these three types of rhythm cycles below.

Table 1. Rhythm cycles in comparison

	categories of the <i>tāl</i>	varieties of <i>tāls</i>	Persian equivalents	Kashmīrī equivalents
1	<i>muleh tāl</i>	<i>tahte yek tāl</i> <i>pūn tāle</i> <i>bantī</i>	<i>ravānī</i> <i>chapandāz</i>	
2	<i>dou tāle</i>	<i>lapte</i>	<i>ufar</i>	<i>dāud pādshāh</i>
3	<i>se tāle</i>	<i>baḡā trī tāle</i> <i>durva yek tāle</i>	<i>dourūye</i> <i>dou yek</i>	
4	<i>chahār tāle</i>	<i>areh</i> <i>choutā choutāle</i> <i>baḡā choutāle</i>	<i>chār zarb</i> <i>nīm dour</i> <i>hezaj</i>	
5	<i>panj tāle</i>	<i>sur fākhte</i>	<i>mohanmas</i> <i>khafte</i> <i>fākhte zarb</i>	
6	<i>shesh tāle</i>	<i>che tāle</i>	<i>chambar</i> <i>dou yek sanghīn</i>	
7	<i>hafte tāle</i>	<i>sāt tāle</i>	<i>nīm saghīl</i>	
8	<i>hashte tāle</i>	<i>barhast tāle</i>	<i>samādī</i> <i>doure shāhī</i>	
9	<i>nahe tāle</i>	<i>nahe tāle</i>	<i>bahre ramal</i>	
10	<i>dah tāle</i>	<i>das tāle</i>	<i>zarb al-fath</i>	
11	<i>yāzdah tāle</i>	<i>yāzān tāle</i>	<i>turkī zarb</i>	
12	<i>dawāzdah tāle</i>	<i>bārān tāle</i>	<i>durāfshān</i>	
13	<i>sīzdah tāle</i>	<i>tīrān tāle</i>	<i>thaqīl</i>	
14	<i>dousad tāle</i> ⁸	<i>brahma tāle</i>	<i>miyātain</i>	

Se Tāle

This category comprises four rhythm cycles. *Baḡā trī tāle* and *durva yek tāle* as the Indian rhythm cycles, and *dourūye* and *dou yek* as the Persian rhythm cycles. Of these rhythm cycles, *barā trī tāle* and *douyek tāle* are selected and written in onomatopoeic notes.

It is important to note that Kachrū started his explanation from the third category of the *tāl* in Table 1. It is not clear why he skipped the first two categories of *tāl* despite *tahteh* (*tahteh yek tāl*) or *chapandāz* being written in the verse attributed to Nizami Aruzī in *Tarāna-yi Surūr*. Perhaps the *se tāle* had been an important *tāl* and one of the more prevalent rhythm cycles of that time.

⁸ Only this *tāl* does not correspond with the number of column on the left as *dousad* means two hundred.

The first is Indian is *se tāle*, which is, in other words, *trī tāle*, which is divide into four *zarb*, with three *zarb* and one *khalā'* (empty) [*Tarāna-yi Surūr* f.12b].

I recognise that his explanation of *se tāle* is like the structure of modern *tīn tāl* (Table 2⁹). We can see the connection between the modern Hindustānī *tāl* and Kachrū's description. Kippen pointed out that the concept of *khālī* which is *rukn*¹⁰ without *zarb* was introduced first in the early 19th century book *Sharḥ-i risāla-yi qawā'id-i tablā* [Kippen 2019: 264]. However, if we take *khalā'* as the same concept of *khālī*, Kachrū could be considered the first to have introduced this concept into the North Indian rhythm theory.

Table 2. *tīn tāl*

×	2			○	3										
dha	dhin	dhin	dha	dha	dhin	dhin	dha	dha	tīn	tīn	ta	ta	dhin	dhin	dha

Kachrū listed four rhythm cycles *dou yek tāle* and *baḍā trī tāle* and compared them. They have some remarkable features, one of them is onomatopoeic music notes *dhish*, used in the beginning of each rhythm cycle in *dou yek tāle*. Evidently, *dhish* is the note used in Kashmīr as an equivalent to *dha* in Hindustānī music.¹¹ According to Pacholczyk, the drum used in *Šūfyāna Mūsīqī* was called the *wosūl* and was replaced by the *tablā* in the early 20th century [Pacholczyk 1996: 39]. Therefore, the *dhish* can be inherited from an older tradition of drum note prevalent before the advent of *tablā* in Kashmīr. It is interesting that the *dhish* is never used in Indian rhythm cycle but only in Persian.

Kachrū wrote that the *dou yek tāle* in Peria is just same as the *chutā trī tāle* in India. This is rather confusing because he first wrote *baḍā trī tāle* (*big trī tāle*) not *chutā trī tāle* (*small trī tāle*).

The first rhythm cycle is *dou yek tāle* of Persia, which goes *dhish tun tun dhish dhish tun*, and the *chutā trī tāle* of Indian rhythm, which goes *dadhina dadain dīn na*. However, he has made a comment that is not mentioned in the Persian manuscript (we do not know which manuscript he is talking about), that there is the twice of *chutā trī tāle*. That means if *dou yek tāle* is played twice without pause, the note of rhythm cycle is *dī neh dadhina dī neh dadhina*.

The second type of *dou yek tāle* that he explains consists of the rhythm *dhish dhish tun*

9 In Table 2, I use the conventional notation system used in modern education of *tablā*. In this system, rhythm cycle is divided by *vibhāg*. each *vibhāg* is articulated with × *sam* (the first beat of the rhythm cycle), 2, 3 the second and the third claps (*zarb*) and ○ *khālī* (*khalā'*).

10 *Rukn* roughly means the division of the rhythm cycle *vibhāg* in modern Hindustānī music rhythm theory.

11 Sourced from an interview with Sāznawāz in Srīnagar on 4/9/2015.

tun dhish dhish tun. The latter is compared with the *baḍā trī tāle*, *dha dhin na dha dhin na dha dhin na dhin na*.

Table 3. *dou yek tāle* and *baḍā trī tāle*

Persian rhythm cycle	notation	Indian rhythm cycle	notation
<i>dou yek tāle</i>	dhish tun tun dhish dhish tun	<i>chutā trī tāle</i>	dadina dadina din na
<i>dou yek tāle</i>	dhish dhish tuntun dhish dhish tun	<i>baḍā trī tāle</i>	dha dhin na dhin na dha dhin na dhin na

The biggest obstacle to analysing these rhythm cycles is that Kachrū did not divide them using the *vibhāg*, which is used for modern Indian rhythm cycles; therefore, it is impossible to know how the three *zarbs* and one *khalā'* are organically integrated.

In the last part of *Tarāna-yi Surūr*, list of rhythm cycles and three other variations of *se tāle* are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. The other types of *se tāle*

name of the cycle	notation
<i>se tāle</i>	deshdeshtun deshdeshtun deshdeshtun deshtuntun
<i>se tāle</i>	denedenata denedenata denedenata denedanata
<i>se tāle</i>	targadetun targadetun targadetun targadetun

These *se tāle* are intact and it is easy to recognise their divisions. Although there are no signs of these articulations used in modern Hindustānī music rhythm theory. (\times , 2, \circ , 3), it is not at all hard to assume that three of the divisions are articulated with *zarb* and the one with *khalā'*. We are still not sure how many beats we should count for those *se tāles*.

During fieldwork in Srinagar, I recorded the rhythm cycle, known as, *dou yek* played by Kaiser Sāznawāz, who was the youngest member of the ensemble. In this recording, he plays the *dou yek* in 16 beats, like *tīn tāl*. Of course, we must be aware that the rhythm cycle played now in Kashmīr cannot be the same as those depicted in 18th century manuscript. However, I want to point out that those rhythm cycles categorized under the umbrella term *se tāle* have commonality and difference. The commonality is that they share the same construction that holds three *zarbs* meaning three claps (*se tāle*) in Indina language. The difference, however, is that the actual numbers of beats could vary on the surface.

Chahār Tāle

Chahār means four in Persian language; Kachrū listed rhythm cycles, *areh*, *choutā chou tāle*, *baḍā chou tāle*, as Indian rhythm cycles and *chār zārb*, *nīm dour*, and *hezaj* in the Persian rhythm cycle. Out of these, he wrote the notation of *areh*, *chou tāle*, *nīm dour* and a longer version of *nīm dour*, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. the notations of *chahār tāle*

name of the cycle	notation
<i>areh</i>	dhish dhish tun dhish dhish tun
<i>chou tāle</i>	dhish dhish take
<i>nīm dour</i>	dhish tun datake dhish dhish tun
<i>nīm dour</i> (long version)	dhish tun tetake dhish dhish tun tun dhish dhish tun tun

Again, an inconsistency in the numbers of beats in this category is apparent. He wrote *areh* as six beats, *chou tāle* as three or four beats, and so on. However, as I motioned in the section of *se tāle*, these cycles, categorized under *chahār tāle*, should have four *zarbs* (claps).

Panj Tāle

There are three rhythm cycles under the *panj tāle* (“five claps” in Persian), and each is written in the onomatopoeic notation, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. the notations of *panj tāle*

name of the cycle	notation
<i>mohanmas</i>	tak tak dhish tak dhish tun dhish dhish tun tak dhish tun tak dhish dhish tun
<i>khafīf</i>	dhish ta tun dhish ta tun dhish ta dhish ta dhish ta tun dhish take dhish dhash tun dhish take dhish tun
<i>fakhte</i>	dhish dhash dhish dhash dhish dhash tun

We see different length and notes of the rhythm cycles under this category. Again, we face the same issue that there are no clear divisions indicated. Therefore, we are unable to figure out the structures of the rhythm cycle. However, we can assume they should have one thing in common. They must be articulated with at least five *zarbs* (claps). We need other sources of information to solidify the analysis of the rhythm theory that Kachrū had relied upon and could possibly influence later authors.

Conclusion

Kashmīrī classical music has been largely overlooked or neglected by the researchers of Indian and Persian classical music. However, as I argue in this paper, several clues about the interaction and synthesis between Indian and Persian music exist, especially in the rhythm theory. I summarise my arguments in three points below.

- 1) The rhythm theory, which was introduced in *Tarāna-yi Surūr*, is neither the one conventionally used in the Sanskrit source, nor the one used in Persian rhythm theory. It is, instead, the combination of both and can be labelled as the Indo-Persian rhythm theory.

- 2) This rhythm theory has the important concept of *zarb* and *khalā'*, which are the modern equivalents of *talī* and *khālī*. From this, we can consider the *Tarāna-yi Surūr* as the one of the earliest music treatises on the modern Hindustānī music rhythm theory.
- 3) The categorization of the rhythm cycles needs to be analysed more comprehensively. However, I argue that the numbers in the Persian language according to which the cycles are named suggests the number of *zarbs* (claps) that articulate the rhythm cycle.

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