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GATI BHEDAM

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Abstract: This study explores the concept of *Gati Bhedam* (variations in rhythmic subdivisions) in South Indian classical music, emphasizing its historical evolution, theoretical foundations, and practical applications. It outlines the significance of rhythm (*Tala*) as a core element of music, tracing its origins to mythological narratives and ancient treatises. The paper examines the *Sapta Talas* (seven primary Talas) and their structure, highlighting how different Gati (subdivisions) – *Tisra*, *Chatusra*, *Khanda*, *Misra*, and *Sankeerna* – expand the 35 traditional Talas into 175 variations. Clear distinctions between *Gati* and *Nadai* are established, underscoring their unique roles in maintaining rhythmic integrity while allowing artistic flexibility. Practical examples of *Korvais* (rhythmic patterns) in different *Gatis* are provided to illustrate these concepts. The study concludes by affirming the enduring relevance of *Gati Bhedam* in modern musical performance and its capacity to enrich the listener's experience through dynamic rhythmic diversity.

Index Terms - Gati Bhedam, Tala, Sapta Talas, Laya, Nadai, Tala Structure

INTRODUCTION

*“In the form of wind and in the form of Shiva,
In the form of dance, in the form of Manmatha
In the unchanging melody of bamboo, in the form of Vedas,
If one sees, it is the rhythm that is perceived.”*

In the art of music, rhythm (time measure) is of utmost importance. The structure that denotes rhythm is known as *Tala*. Uniform time structure leads to monotony, hence multiple rhythmic patterns were created.

As a result, various Talas came into existence, each defined with specific time structures and rules.

In music, *Raga* and *Tala* are essential components. Especially in structured music, the absence of *Tala* deprives music of its essence. Both *Raga* and *Tala* together enrich musical expression, governed by many rules.

ORIGIN OF TALA

According to legend, when Lord Shiva performed the Ananda Tandava (cosmic dance), the anklet bells on his feet spun and flew off. When he tried to catch them, one fell on his shoulder making the sound “Tha”, and then dropped to the ground making the sound “Lam” – hence the word Talam was born. The interval between these sounds is called Laya.

In the saying “Shruti Mata, Laya Pita” (Shruti is the mother, Laya is the father), Laya signifies synchronization with Shruti (pitch) and Tala (rhythm). Tala divides and measures time and ensures rhythmic integrity. Just like a regular heartbeat is a sign of health, rhythmic regularity is essential in life. The universe itself operates with rhythm – planetary motion, walking, running – all exhibit rhythm.

The syllables “Tha” and “La” in Talam are symbolic of Shiva and Parvati respectively. India has an unparalleled tradition of Tala, tracing back to Bharata’s time, with 108 Margi Talas (traditional Talas), followed by numerous Desi Talas (folk-derived).

From Purandara Dasa’s time (16th century), the Carnatic system formalized the Sapta Talas (seven basic Talas), which remain the primary system used today, along with a few others like Chaputalas. Tamil Nadu once used many Talas now obsolete, glimpsed through Tiruppugazh compositions.

SAPTA TALAS (SEVEN TALAS)

These are:

- Dhruva
- Matya
- Rupaka
- Jhampa
- Triputa
- Ata
- Eka

Each Tala is made of three Angas (components): *Laghu*, *Anudrutam*, and *Drutam*. Each Tala has a specific structure and symbol.

No.	Tala	Structure	Symbol
1	Dhruva	1 Laghu, 1 Drutam, 2 Laghus	IOII
2	Matya	1 Laghu, 1 Anudrutam, 1 Drutam	IOI
3	Rupaka	1 Laghu, 1 Drutam	OI
4	Jhampa	1 Laghu, 1 Anudrutam, 1 Drutam	IUO
5	Triputa	1 Laghu, 2 Drutams	I00
6	Ata	2 Laghus, 2 Drutams	II00
7	Eka	1 Laghu	I

GATI BHEDAM

The ten vital aspects (*Uir Nadigal*) of a Tala are: *Kalam* (time), *Margam* (path), *Kriya* (action), *Angam* (limb), *Graham* (start point), *Jati* (beat groupings), *Kalai* (tempo multiplier), *Laya* (rhythm), *Yathi* (design), and *Prastharam* (progression). Notably, *Gati* and *Nadai* are **not** included among these. The reason is that these two terms specifically represent the subdivision aspects of Tala independently.

The word **Gati** comes from Sanskrit, while **Nadai** is its Tamil equivalent. Though they refer to similar concepts, over centuries, eminent scholars have treated them with distinct interpretations.

Gati refers to how the rhythmic cycle (*Tala*) is subdivided into a certain number of beats. In practice, the 35 Talas expand into 175 Talas through five different Gati variations. Sometimes a song is said to be set to *Adi Tala* with *Tisra Gati*. However, many mistakenly refer to this as *Tisra Nadai* without understanding the practical distinction between Gati and Nadai.

This understanding is aligned with the methodologies of great musicians like:

- Kallidaikurichi Vedanta Bhagavatar
- Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar
- Jalatarangam Subbaiyer
- Perungulam Srinivasa Iyengar
- Chittoor Subramanya Pillai
- The Alathur Brothers

Their works and recordings serve as foundational references for these explanations.

Gati specifically indicates how many units (*matras*) are there per beat in the Tala structure. For example, in *Adi Tala* with *Tisra Gati*, there are **24 matras** per cycle.

Nadai, on the other hand, refers to rendering the existing Tala structure (without altering its Gati) using rhythmic patterns (*jathi solkattu* phrases) or melodic phrases (*swaras*) grouped as 3, 4, 5, 7, or 9 beats within each beat, without disturbing the overall cycle.

Example: In the *Mohanam Varnam* "Ninnu Kori" set to *Adi Tala* in *Chatusra Gati*, each cycle (Avarthanam) has **32 matras**.

$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	
				=4/4=1
				=3/3=1

$\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{1}{3}$

In the second cycle of the Pallavi:

- "Kabaga - Karisa - Rigari - Ristha - Sariga - Ri" → (matras grouped as 3, 3, 3, 3, 3)
- "Kaba - Kabada - Padas - Thapa - Kathabagari" → (matras grouped as 3, 3, 3, 3, 5) = 32 matras

Here, there are nine sections with *Tisra Jati Nadai* patterns and one section with a *Khanda Jati Nadai* at the end.

In 1913, the great scholar **Perungulam Srinivasa Iyengar** systematically explained these rhythmic syllabic groupings (*Tathakara structures*) from page 31 to 189 in his monumental work *Sangeethanubhava Saara Sangraham* (Volume II).

In Nadai structuring, rhythmic phrases (Nadai words) can be placed in odd or even locations within a beat. Thus:

- **Gati** defines the *unit division* of Tala's beats.
- **Nadai** (or *Jati Nadai*) refers to fitting rhythmic phrases within the pre-established Gati structure without changing the total number of beats.

175 TALAS

Just as the 7 basic Talas expand into 35 through Jati variations ($7 \times 5 = 35$), applying 5 types of Gati to these 35 Talas results in **175 Talas** ($35 \times 5 = 175$).

When the subdivisions within each beat (Aksharas) follow Tisra (3), Chatusra (4), Khanda (5), Misra (7), or Sankeerna (9) counts, it is called **Gati Bhedam**.

Each Tala component must be formed by one of these five Gatis. The same beat (Thattu) must not mix different Gatis in different parts. This consistent structure forms the basis for expanding the 35 Talas into 175.

In performances such as:

- Percussion (mridangam, tavil)
- *Kalpana Swaram* singing
- Adding Jathi combinations
- Dance sequences

artists perform **Gati Bhedam** to enhance rhythmic interest.

While doing Gati Bhedam:

- **Laya** (rhythmic flow) should not become distorted.
- The time interval between each beat must remain consistent.
- Matras must be redistributed within the same time duration according to the new Gati.

Achieving this requires strong understanding (*Tala Gnanam*) and extensive practice.

KORVAIS STRUCTURED IN GATI BHEDAM

Tisra Gati (3 units per beat)

Tisra means "Takita", indicating a rhythmic unit of **3 counts**. When this is combined with other talas under Gati Bhedam, the overall matra count changes, forming **Tisra Gati Talas**.

This particular Korvai structured in **16 aksharas** (beats) can be played in talas with 8 or 16 aksharas.

- **Poorvangam (first part) – 28 Matras**

<i>Tatti takajonu tinda</i>	8 matras
<i>Taka</i>	2 karvais (rests)
<i>Ti takajonu tinda</i>	6 matras
<i>Taka</i>	2 karvais
<i>Tinda</i>	2 matras
<i>Taka</i>	2 karvais

- **Uttarangam (second part) – 36 Matras**

<i>Tattom tatikkitatom</i>	8 matras
<i>Tangu</i>	3 karvais
<i>Tattom tatikkitatom tattom tatikkitatom</i>	16 matras
<i>Tangu</i>	3 karvais
<i>Tattom tatikkitatom tattom tatikkitatom tattom tatikkitatom</i>	24 matras

Chatusra Gati (4 units per beat)

Chatusram means "Takadhimi", indicating **4 counts per unit**. Used similarly, it forms **Chatusra Gati Talas**.

This Korvai fits within 8 or 16 akshara Talas.

- **Poorvangam – 28 Matras**

<i>Tatti takajonu</i>	16 matras
<i>Tatti takajonu</i>	8 matras
<i>Tatti takajonu</i>	4 matras

- **Uttarangam – 36 Matras**

<i>Tatikitatom</i>	5 matras
<i>Tangu</i>	3 karvais
<i>Tatikitatom tatikitatom</i>	10 matras
<i>Tangu</i>	3 karvais
<i>Tatikitatom tatikitatom tatikitatom</i>	15 matras

Kanda Gati (4 units per beat)

Khanda refers to a division where each beat has **5 matras** ('Takatakita').

This pattern can be played in Talas having **10** or **20** syllables.

- **Purvanga (First Half) – 60 Matras**

Phrase	Matras
Tinda Tim Tattitakitom	10 matras
Takaka	5 karvais
Tinda Tim Tattitakitom Tattitakitom	15 matras
Takaka	5 karvais
Tinda Tim Tattitakitom Tattitakitom Tattitakitom	20 matras
Takaka	5 karvais

- **Uttaranga (Second Half) – 40 Matras**

Phrase	Matras
Takidatam Tattitakitom	10 matras
Takaka	5 karvais
Takidatam Tattitakitom	10 matras
Takaka	5 karvais
Takidatam Tattitakitom	10 matras

Conclusion

In today's context, significant changes have occurred across spiritual, social, economic, educational, and musical spheres. Within the various evolutions of music, Tala (rhythm) continues to play an essential role. In live performances, the use of a single Tala with slight rhythmic variations across instruments excites and engages listeners. The beauty of rhythmic artistry - including Nada (sound), Layam (tempo), and the crafted rhythmic patterns (Gatis) - provides aesthetic bliss to the audience. Introducing and promoting the application of **Gati Bhedam** in contemporary practice is a highly commendable development. As we live in a technological era, the spread of our prestigious artistic traditions to the corners of the world is assured.

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