Warm up – introducing the ṭukḍā

Speaking tablā compositions is integral to a tablā player’s training and an important medium of sikśā, or instruction by the guru (teacher). Speaking the bol of a ṭukḍā makes for a good warm up at the beginning of a lesson. It is a lot of fun, immensely satisfying when the last bol of the tihāi coincides with the first mātrā of the tāl, and an easy way of developing a strong sense of pulse and rhythm.

The ṭukḍā is a rhythmic form played on the tablā that can either be fixed or improvised. Ṭukḍā means ‘piece’, for example a piece of music or a piece of cake. It comprises of a rhythmic idea and culminates in a tihāi with the last bol of the tihāi culminating with a predetermined mātrā of the tāl, very often the first, known as sam.

The chosen ṭukḍā begins and concludes on the first mātrā of tīn tāl over one, two or even four āvartan, depending on the lay or tempo of both the tāl and the ṭukḍā.

Word rhythms are a helpful way of teaching unfamiliar and complex rhythms that are commonplace in the teaching of Western music but not so prevalent in the teaching of Indian music. You will see that we have used word rhythms to teach the rhythm of the entire ṭukḍā.

In advance of the first lesson, familiarise yourself with the ṭukḍā as much as possible, both the versions using word rhythms and the tablā mnemonics. The structure provided in this video clip can be used so that you become accustomed to the ṭukḍā.

Become familiar with the rhythm of the ṭukḍā by using the word rhythms, graphic score, Western score, our video clip or simultaneously using any combination of the four.

Assuming that the ṭukḍā is performed over one āvartan:

- the rhythmic idea begins on the first mātrā (I love rabbits…)
- and ends on the third quarter of the fifth mātrā (spi-ders-and)
- the first tihāi phrase begins on the last-quarter of the fifth mātrā (go-ri-la)
- and concludes on the ninth mātrā (ti-gers too)

Each tihāi phrase is followed by two quarter-beat rests, except the last bol of the third repetition, which coincides with the sam or the first beat of the next āvartan when the tihāi and the ṭukḍā are complete.

The video clip is useful in order to hear the rhythm of the ṭukḍā, while the graphical score and Western score will be useful to visualise the structure of the ṭukḍā, as well as to familiarise yourself and practice the ṭukḍā at your own pace.

**Note:** the use of the word gorilla, as opposed to any other three-syllable animal name, is significant because the emphasis is on the second syllable, which coincides with the beginning of the sixth mātrā. Try replacing ‘gorilla’ with ‘elephant’ and consider if it is as effective.
Advice to ‘take away’: as people are thought to learn better when they receive information through various senses, it may be helpful to engage with the ṭukḍā by using the pictorial score, listening to it on the video and by speaking it – either on your own or, if you’re teaching, with your students.