

# Vaishnav Singing Style of Dhamar- New Possibility in Music Education

## Abstract

Dhamar is a special kind of song which is sung on the description of the festival of Holi. The song sung in Dhamar tala is called Dhamar. It is a kind of Hori. A Dhamar depicts the picture of life activities of Shree Krishna just like Raas leelas which are sung to display the life activities of Radha and Krishna in month of Phalgun of Vikram Era. Shrangar Rasa is more prominent in Dhamar. It contains four parts like Dhruvad Gayan - Sthai (First part), Antara (Second part), Sanchari (Third Part) and Abhog (Fourth part). These Gayans are sung in Gamak, Meend, Bolbants, Upaj and in Dugun, Chaugun laykari. It also requires a forceful sound and it is sung in slow rhythm.

What we sing in the institutional dhamar, is quite different from the dhamar of Sampradayas. This style should also be encouraged and bring forward for the students to learn a traditional and style both.

**Keywords:** Rhythm, Etymological structure, Tone

## Introduction

Vaishnavism is a tradition of Hinduism in which music is considered to be the innate part of worship. According to time and seasons, ragas and singing styles are put into practice.

Dhamar is one of those singing styles and is associated with the festival of Holi and the life of lord Krishna. **Dhamar** is famous for its rhythm (Sur & Taal's great combination).

Dhamar, is style of singing which brings out the pristine quality of music, that is the sheer profundity of human voice. A dhamar is set to the 14-beat time signature Dhamar tal is called a **Dhamar**. It is seen as a light musical form, and associated with the Holi (hori) festival of colours. At some point in history Hori and Dhamar used to be different, but now these are synonymous and part of Vaishnav Sampradayas.

In Dhamar, padas (literary poetic structure) are sung with many antaras. Devotee singers start with the based compositions set into Dhamar taal after a certain period of taal-cycle they start singing in Deepchandi to beautify and end it with the charm of Keharawa. Aalap, Upaj, Bol-baant with laykari enhance its melodic contour.

What we sing in the institutional dhamar, is quite different from the dhamar of Sampradayas. This style should also be encouraged and bring forward for the students to learn a traditional and style both!

The worship in different perspectives or historical traditions addresses God under the name of Narayana, Krishna, Vasudeva or more often "Vishnu", and their associated avatars. Its beliefs and practices, especially the concepts of **Bhakti** and **Bhakti Yoga** are based largely.

Pakki Hori is called "Dhamar". Dhamar, the term is derived from "**Dhamaal**" of Braj Bhasha which means "hustle" and merry making of mirthful hustle is described in Dhamar. This styles based on Ragas, Talas and variation in singing in Bhakti Sampradayas of Vrindavan and Mathura. Basically, this genre was associated with Dhruvad. In Bhakti Sampradayas Dhruvad was always followed by Dhamaar but in the month of Phalgun it was used separately.

Further will consider over the definitions of Dhamar, some of them are given below:-

According to **E.S. Parera**, "Holi, by tradition is sung in Dhamar tala and it is popularly known as Dhamar or pakki Hori".<sup>1</sup> According to **William Jones & N. Willard**, "Holi or Hori consists of four tuks or strains like Dhruvad and the style is peculiar to itself".<sup>2</sup>

According to **O. Goswami**, "Since around the subject matter of this style of music are woven glories of Krishna's pranks during the holi festival and since it is sung in Dhamar tala it has come to be known as Hori Dhamar.

## Payal Sharma

Research Scholar,  
Music Department,  
Dayalbagh Educational Institute,  
Agra ( U.P.)  
payalsharma@gmail.com

In the beginning it was a type of the folk song of Vrindavan and Mathura. It came as a competitor to nascent khyal and in contrast to Dhrupad shed the austerity, adopting tonal sensuousness expressing or rather describing emotion".<sup>3</sup>

According to **Selina Thielemann**, "Dhamar compositions occupy a special position within the Dhrupad genre. Dhamar has its origin in the vaishnav temple music tradition of Braj where it forms a distinct repertoire of verses sung during the season of Holi, the Indian spring festival. This original notion has been maintained in classical Dhamar whose texts are always associated with the Holi theme".<sup>4</sup>

#### **Vaishnav Sampradayas carrying Dhamar in Musical Perspectives:**

The centres of **Bhakti Sampradayas** Mathura and Vrindavan are considered to be the torch bearers of "**Kirtans**" which provide Dhrupad and Dhamaar to Hindustani Music. Bhakti Sampradayas such as Pushtimarg, Sakhi Sampradaya, Haridasi Sampradaya, Vallabh Sampradaya observe nothing equal such remembrance of God when it is mingled with music. The traditional style of vocal music developed through these Sampradayas specifically to celebrate this arrival of spring with devotion.

Dhamar compositions with **devotional theme** are almost always related to Krishna and Radha. Depending upon the creativity and imagination of the devotee poet or musician, while the lyrics of a Dhamar may envision the colourful galaxies as Krishna splashing colours or playing Holi in the universe, the another devotee may depict playing Holi between Radha & Krishna with love, any other poet may express the longing that arises from not finding Krishna around even on the festival of Holi.

Many Dhamar that display a delightful feel illustrate gopis, gwals who already have their souls irreversibly coloured in his love.

#### **Literary Framework of Dhamar:**

For the etymological structure of Dhamar, Vernacular Braj Bhasha is used. The structure of Dhamaar is divided into two parts namely (i) Sthayi (ii) Antara. There exist many stanzas or antaras in this style. Rasa, Chhand, Alankaar, Bhav can easily be viewed in Dhamaar. For example:

#### **Dhamar- Pad I**

**Sthayi :** Hori Khelan aayo Nandkumar Biraj mein  
Sung liye apne bal-gwalan nei

**Antara:** Ghoomat, Daurat, Dhoom machavat

Rang, gulal le haathan mein

[This pad (structure) shows that Nandkumar (Krishna) has come to play Holi with small kids of milkmen. He is wandering, running and making mirthful hustle with the hands full of gulal and abeer (colours)]

In this Dhamaar Pad, the Baal-Roop (Child form) of Shri Krishna is depicted. The whole account of Holi playing is related with the Bhava (mood) of childish activities.

Another Dhamaar pad is related with the time of youth, blooming charm and romance -

#### **Dhamar Pad II**

**Sthayi:** Kanha Khelat hori Radha sung  
aavat naar naveli gori

**Antara:** Kabahu lajavat Radha aru sakuchawat

Radha ki vo ek maanat

Rang gulal ki keech machavat

Hase dei taan, kahe hori hori

(Kanha is coming to play with Radha who is very fair and delicate lady. She is shy and hesitates to play but he does not listen to anything. He has thrown colours up to the level to make the way muddy He laughs, claps and yells Hori!! Hori!! )

The givers Dhamaar pad is an authentic example of "Bhava" presentation as far as romanticism is concerned in the Bhakti Sampradayas. Now, an example of Virah Dhamaar pad is given below in which Radha or soul is longing for Krishna or the eternal abode -

#### **Dhamar pad III**

**Sthayi:** Kaun sung khele Hori Radhika

Sochi sochi nain bhar aavat

**Antara:** Abeer gulal kesar ki pihkari

Kou ko na lagat hai piyari

Radha asuan neer bahavat

(With whom Radha should play Holi, she weeps the moment she thinks about this. So many colour there but nothing appears lovable to her tears come out of the eyes of Radha)

These three example of Dhamaar padas depict the Holi celebration but the hidden meaning folder spirituality is that the soul loves to be with GOD all the time and when it does not find GOD along, it laments, repents, cries and remembers GOD continuously. In the padas or literal framework of Dhrupad one can find religious note but in Dhamaar, the relation between soul and GOD is directly indicated. That is why, Dhamaar is sung at the end of the samaj gayan or kirtan in Bhakti Sampradayas. How these Dhamaar Hori padas are musically sung, it is being stated here-

#### **Musical Structure of Dhamar**

Major distinguishing characteristic of Dhamaar is the relationship of **Swara** (note) with **Shadja** (tone) which determines the placement of swaras within the saptak (octave). The gayak (singer) sings and improvises it with **alaap** (slow progression of swaras) and layakari (tempo or rhythm variations) composed in a tala (tune) called "Dhamaar". There exist the scope of systematic improvisation in the building up of the pada composed in specific Raga which means a succession of musical note. The leader or master of the group brings out new combination, repetitive phrases and different patterns of tempo or **layakari**. Great stress is laid on voice-culture through regular and systematic singing in the temples. There are some major rules for the singers to follow-

1. To remain staunch devotees of GOD and live simple life like seers.
2. To sing the Kirtan Bhajans, Dhurpad and Dhamaar according to time and season.
3. Having trained and melodious voice with perfect control.
4. To have deep knowledge of most of the ragas, techniques and various composition.
5. To have pleasant expression of face and hand gestures.
6. To have thorough knowledge of Tala, layakaris and group singing.

**Ragas & Tala Prescribed for Dhamar Gaan:**

There is long list of Ragas which are used for Dhamar Hori. Some are given below-

Bhairav	Samant Sarang	Kafi
Gaud	Gaud Sarang	Shree
Malhar	Puriya	Megh Malhar
Bilaval	Darbari	Gaur Kalyan
Asavari	Adana	Kamod
Todi	Purvi	Nat Bilaval
Lalit	Basant	Bhoopali
Malkauns	Sohni	Bihaag
Dhanashri	Hindol	Pancham
Jaitshree	Desh	Malhar
Vrindavani Sarang		

Dhamar Tala of 14 matras divided into 4 Vibagas is used for Dhamar Gaan –

Ka dhi ta dhi ta	dha	--	Ge ti ta	ti ta taa	–
X	2		0	3	

Musical instruments for Dhamar Gaan-

Tanpura	Jantra	Pakhavaj- (Mridang)
Dholak	Kinnari	Rabab
Sur Mandal	Jhanj	Morchang
Ghanta	Madan- Bheri	Dhap
Harmonium	Dilruba	Shankh
Damaru	Thali	Kar-taal
Khanjari		
Manjira		

Thus, Dhamar gaan is such versatile occasion and occurrence which provides festivity, Spirituality, musical enhancement and exuberant folk colours of musical notes.

**References :**

1. Perera, E.S., The Origin and Development of Dhrupad and it's Bearing On Instrumental Music, Pg. 162
2. Jones William and Willard N., Music of India, Pg. 68
3. Goswami, O., The Story of Indian Music, Pg. 127
4. Thielmann, Selina, The Darbhanga Tradition, Pg. 22-23
5. Bisht, Krishna, Sacred Symphony, Pg. 102-103