

Design Resource

## Saraswathi Veena Making

Traditional and Classical Musical Instrument

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Shruti K and Vijay G

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/saraswathi-veena-making>



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<https://dsource.in/resource/saraswathi-veena-making/introduction>

## Introduction

Thanjavur or Tanjore is a district in Tamil Nadu state of South India. Thanjavur is a well-known for its tradition, arts, architecture and culture, also famous for heritage temples which are located in the district. Veena is a traditional and classical musical instrument of India. Veena symbolizes the art and culture of traditional India. Music and dance play a vital role in the cultural life of Tamil Nadu; Veena Playing is one among them. Hence, Veena making has become major craft of Thanjavur. Many families of Thanjavur are involved in Veena making.

Saraswathi Veena is the instrument associated with Saraswathi, the goddess of learning and the arts. This instrument is common in south India and is an important instrument in Carnatic sangeet. The traditional art is carried alive from ancient times to new generation. According to Hindu Mythology Gods and goddesses play various instruments particularly veena is played by goddesses Saraswathi.

Instruments are made from wood of Jackfruit tree. The skilled art of Veena making is made on the single block of wood. Several stages are involved in making of Veena. The instruments are made and sold worldwide according to the customers demand. Veena is played in the famous temples of Thanjavur and on other auspicious occasions alongside the use of other Musical instruments.



Jackfruit tree log/wood cut in the basic shape of veena.

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Intricate design carving made on veena.



Artisan involved in veena carving process.



Design of goddess Saraswathi beautifully carved on the veena.

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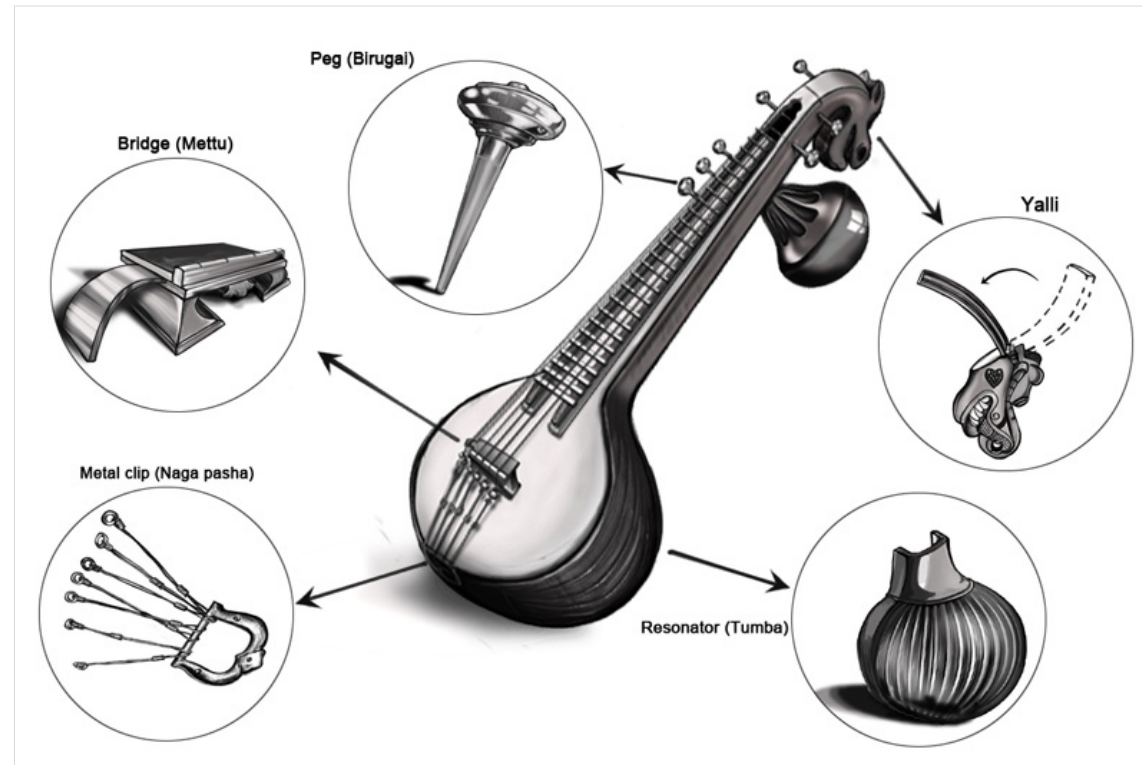
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Different parts of the veena explained through illustrations.

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## Tools and Raw Materials

Different types of tools and raw materials are used for making Veena. Jackfruit wood is used as a basic raw material for the veena making purpose. Jackfruit trees are abundantly available in Tanjore region. The initial or the base parts are made by the expert artisans. The different parts of the wood are attached by the locally made adhesive. Wood/Saw dust is also used to cover the gaps in between. Lac work is beautifully made on the product to give an elegant look at the end of the process. The miniature designs are attractively carved by chiseling which gives a rich look to the product.

### List of tools and raw materials used:

- **Jackfruit Wood:** The basic raw material for making Veena.
- **Chisels and Hammers:** These are used in carving different types of designs.
- **L' shaped Scale:** This scale helps in marking and measuring the motifs.
- **Wood Husk, Fevicol and Yellow Colour Powder:** These are mixed into a paste and applied to the Veena to cover the cracks.
- **Lac Colours:** Lac is used in inlay work.
- **Bee Wax and Coal Powder:** Wax and coal powder are used to make the base for the brass metal frets.
- **Gum Benzoin:** This is melted and mixed with colour powder to obtain lac colour which is inlayed on the plastic sheet.
- **Buffing Machine:** This machine is used to smoothen the surface of wood and make it even.
- **Drilling Tool:** Tool which is manually operated.
- **Pegs and Knobs:** These are attached to the Veena to which strings are tied for tuning purposes.
- **Brass and Steel Strings:** Brass and Steel strings are attached to the Veena through which music is produced.
- **Sandpaper and Files:** These are used to smoothen the surface of the wood.

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Different sizes of chisels used to carve the veena.



Multi sizes of files and wood scrapers used to smoothen the wood surface of veena.



Different kind of saw tools used for cutting the wood.



Tool used to measure the length of the veena.

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Different types of measuring tools.



Gum benzoin mixed with colour used in inlay work on the veena.



Manual drilling tool.



Wood husk, fevicol, colour powder and pop powder are used to prepare a paste that is applied to the veena to fill the cracks.

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Hammers and wooden mallet used for hammering purpose.



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Stand and supporter to hold the veena.



Brass and Steel string.

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Lac colours are used for inlay work.

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Knobs attached to the veena to tie the string.



Bee wax and gum benzoin mixture.

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Tools used in string attaching process.



Sandpaper is used to smoothen/polish the wood surface.



Mixture of beeswax and coal powder used to make the base for the brass metal frets.

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## Making Process

The making process involves several stages such as:



Veena Carving



Bridge Making

Source:

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String Attachment

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## Veena Carving

The Veena is four feet in length consisting of a large resonator (Tumba), a wooden bridge (Mettu), a tapering hollow neck (Dandi), a smaller non-functional resonator and seven strings of Veena. Veena making process involves many stages with the teamwork of artisans. Skilled and expert artisans are involved in the making of Veena. The traditional instrument making process begins with carving a single log of wood into Veena's base. Jackfruit wood is used to make the Veena. The process of making Veena is very much precise and it takes at least 3 to 4 days to complete one complete Veena. Jackfruit wood (Pala Maram) is procured from the market and kept for seasoning and maturing. Jackfruit wood is easy to carve when the wood is moist; once the wood becomes dry it's hard to carve with it.

The entire instrument/Veena is carved out from one single piece of wood. Sometimes wood breaks while carving because of its hardness, at that time parts of Veena are carved separately and joined together after carving. Artisan first carves the basic shape of the Veena out of single wood. After acquiring the basic shape exact shape of Veena is marked on the wood using a stencil and measurements. The wood is carved in the circular part and then wood is scooped out from the large base part in order to create hollowness, which is known as the resonator (Tumba). The resonator is covered with a wooden sheet/plate. Initially, rough designs are traced on the wooden sheet and marked to do the carving. Designs are carved by chiseling. After obtaining the shape, the surface is scraped and smoothed using sandpaper. To fill the cracks, the mixture of jack wood husk, pop powder, yellow colour powder and adhesive are mixed and applied to the cracks/fissures which surface on the body/structure/surface of Veena. When cracks are filled and the mixture is dried, the surface is smoothed using sandpaper. A thin coat of solution made of pop powder, adhesive and yellow colour powder is painted on the Veena to hide the crack patches. The body of the wood is carved with beautiful designs of goddesses, flowers and bird motifs on it. Traditional art includes a unique style of design. Carving is also done on the surface of the Veena in order to enhance its look.

In the olden days, ivory carvings and inlay works were made on the Veena and deer horns were fixed on the Veena. Currently, acrylic sheets are inlaid with lac colours which are fixed on the Veena to give more ethnic styles. Pegs and knobs for the strings are made in rosewood and fitted into the instruments with the help of beeswax. A decorative carved Yalli is fixed to the other end of the Veena.

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Jack wood is cut into basic shape of veena.



Measurements are marked for the exact shape of the veena to be carved.

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The resonator is carved and the wood is scooped out to make it hollow. It takes 2-4 days to make one complete veena.



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Parts of veena are filed to remove the rough edges.



The wood surface is smoothed by scraping.

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Mixture of jack wood husk, pop powder, yellow colour powder and adhesive is made.



Buffering machine is used to buffer the wood surface for a smooth finishing.



The wood husk mixture is applied on the wood to fill the cracks.

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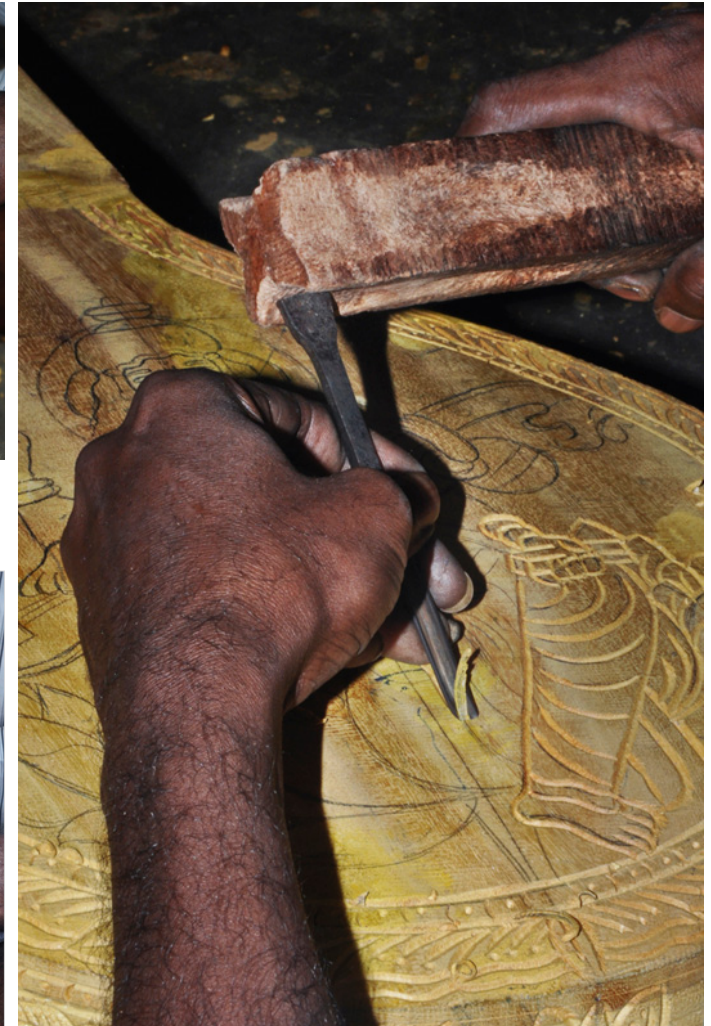
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Rough sketch of the design to be carved is traced on the veena.



Artisan adds detail to the rough sketch.



The design is carved using chisel and wooden mallet.

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Measurements are taken to fix the wooden stick on the veena neck, which acts as a step for the brass metal frets.



A decorative piece called yalli is attached at the end of the neck.



A small door is made for the peg box.



Carved door is attached to the peg box.

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Pegs and knobs are fixed to the veena's neck.

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A coat of thin solution made of pop powder, adhesive and yellow colour powder is painted to hide the crack patches.



Carving and fixing of veena parts are complete.

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## Bridge Making

The main part of Veena is the bridge. Wood is carved in the shape of the bridge. Aarak (lacquer) is melted and applied on the wooden bridge on which a flat bar of brass is fixed. Holes are drilled on either of the bridge's legs. Saw powder and adhesive are put in the holes and a small piece of wood is fixed in the whole. The wooden bridge is fixed in the middle of the resonator. A slightly curved brass bar is fixed adjacent to the bridge, which gives the Veena its characteristic sound. The strings are fixed to the Veena, passing over these brass bars.



Wood is carved/cut in the shape of a bridge.



Bee wax is heated to melt.



The melted wax is applied on the wooden bridge.



A flat brass bar is fixed on the bridge with help of bee wax.

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Excess of wax is removed with the help of chisel.



The brass bar is again heated to fix it on the wax.



The heated brass piece is placed on the wax to fix firmly.



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Excess edge of the brass piece is cut.



The brass bar is filed/polished to refine the edges.



Artisan checks for any changes to be made.

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Measurements are taken to place the bridge on the veena at a precise place.



The bridge is fixed to the veena.



Adhesive and wood husk is applied underneath the bridge piece.

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## String Attachment

The strings are attached by the Veena-making artist. Seven metal strings are tied at the end of the resonator to a metallic clasp using metal rings. This helps the musician with accurate tuning. Brass and steel strings are then tied to these seven rings. Four strings pass upon the bridge among which two strings will be of brass and two of steel. Three strings pass over the curve bar adjacent to the bridge. The four main strings ascend into and are attached to the four pegs (Birugai), in the pegbox, which is at the end of the Veena neck. The other three strings are attached to the knobs (Kauji) on the sides of the neck. A mixture of beeswax, candle wax, benzoin resin (Sambrani) and charcoal powder is melted and kneaded/prepared into the dough. This dough is rolled into a thick long strip and fixed on the fingerboard as a base for the brass metal frets (Mettu Katti). 24 brass frets are attached to the fingerboard. The strings are attached to one side using small metal rings and tuning is checked. Finished Veena's are painted with varnish to give an elegant look. Veena varies from one piece to the other. The instrument is then tested and sent to the market.



A hole is drilled on the metallic clasps.

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The clasp is attached to the veena.



The strings are attached to the metallic clasp.



Strings are tied to the pegs on the other end of the veena.

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Pegs are turned to tighten the strings.



Nails are hammered to hold the bee wax strip firmly.



Mixture of bee wax and charcoal powder is melted.



The molten wax is poured on the ground and kneaded/pressed into a dough.

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Strips of wax dough is made and fixed on the veena's neck.



Artisan fixes the brass metal frets on the wax strip.



Twenty four brass frets are fixed in a veena.



Excess bee wax is removed with the help of a blade.

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The edges of the frets are locked with wax.



Holes are made on the wax strip to specify the main tune notes.



The wax strip is cleaned with kerosene to give smooth finishing and shine.

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## Products

While it takes at least one week to prepare one set of Ganjappa, its price varies between Rs. 600 to Rs. 5,400 with very limited customers. Sometimes, tourists buy these for decorative purposes or as glass covers or just as collectables for art lovers.



Saraswathi veena with inlay design work on it.



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An old veena decorated with silver paper and carved gold plates of goddess Saraswathi.



Floral and figures of goddess Saraswathi are the common motifs carved on the veena.



Intricate design of floral, peacock and goddess Lakshmi carved on the veena.

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Artisan testing the tunes of the completed veena.

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## Videos



Stage 1 - Part 1



Stage 1 - Part 2



Stage 1 - Part 3



Stage 2 - Part 1

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Stage 2 - Part 2



Stage 3



Wax Application

Design Resource

## Saraswathi Veena Making

Traditional and Classical Musical Instrument  
by

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Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/saraswathi-veena-making/contact-details>

## Contact Details

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