

Design Resource

Tabla Making - Bengaluru, Karnataka

The Fundamental Musical Instruments

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baraland Rakshitha

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/tabla-making-bengaluru-karnataka>



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2. Tools and Raw Materials
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Introduction

Tabla is one of the fundamental musical instruments that is linked with genre of music. It is a pair of leath-er-topped drums that is practiced in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, though it is not practiced worldwide. But when it comes to the fusion form of music, tabla also gets combined with the various musical forms of music of the world. The instrument has also attracted the attention of many scholars, musicians and music lovers across the globe for its sophistication and charm. As the instrument tabla falls under the classical genre, it is incom-plete without tabla in any sort of Indian music. Playing tabla accompanies many of the vocal concerts and also Bharatanatya. Vidwan.R.S.Anantharamaiah born on 30th September 1938 was a famous personality known for his achievements in the field of music. He was awarded many prestigious awards like “Laya Vaadya Bhooshana”, “Lalitha Kala Bhooshana” and “Karnataka Kalashri”.

Tabla is manufactured in shops that are exclusively meant for manufacturing these particular instruments. In such shops the contribution of a number of experienced technicians who are well versed in the job is immense. The more experienced tabla makers provide the better instrument. Most of all the eminent tabla exponents prefer to use the personalized tabla developed by the most experienced tabla makers from the tabla shops. One of such tabla shops is “Shantha Tabla Works”.

Vidwan. R. S. Anantharamaiah being born and brought up in a traditional family, he was very much interested in playing percussion instruments. He has also played Mridanga, Khanjira and Dholki for many concerts. Later his interest turned towards the making of the instruments like Tabla and Mridanga. He learned the making of these instruments for many years under the guidance of Vidwan.Venkatappa that led him to open “Shantha Tabla Works” in future days. Vidwan .R .S .Anantharamaiah founder proprietor of Shantha tabla works established the store in 1962. He was recognized as the best mridanga and tabla maker of his generation. His instruments were purchased by many of the famous artists. From then till now the Shantha tabla works is run successfully at Bengaluru. Currently Mr.Srinivasa Anantharamaiah son of Vidwan.R.S.Anantharamaiah is looking after the shop and keeping busy himself by making tabla and mridanga. He also has students from Japan and other foreign countries to learn morsing/mourching, playing tabla, mridanga, ghatam, kanjeera and dholak from him. The instruments built at Shantha tabla works are issued ‘fumigation certificate’ referred as ‘pest control certificate’ by legal fumi-gator and then they are exported to foreign countries like Australia and etc.

Tabla is most popularly known as the traditional Indian music instrument. It is considered as the queen of percus-sion instruments. It is an accompaniment of instrumental music, dance and vocal. A pair of two drums in which Bayan and Dayan are called as Tabla. This pair of two drums is usually played together in combination to produce an incredible rhythmic composition with its fullness of detailed expressions. These drums are usually closed at the bottom and are covered with the skin of goat at the top. But these skins used for the drums are likely to be torn off depending on how often the instruments are used hence the skins has to be changed from time to time.

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Tabla is an instrument of fingers, which could be played effortlessly once the person masters in learning the process of his hands positioning and the movements of the fingers by grasping the lessons of this art. To play the instrument in most comfortable way one's waist position must be straight and each of his hands must be placed on dayan and bayan in such a way that there shouldn't be any stiffness. The playing technique of these two drums simultaneously requires differentiated fingering in connection with the complex composition of the skin membranes. Thus the comfortable positioning and excellent fingering offers the enjoyment of playing tabla and right sound. But now a days with the evolution of traditional instruments, Tabla has been modified in the aspects of size, weight, color and height also to fit the requirement of the soloist. Hence it is simplified for ease of playing the instrument and to produce conceivable music. But Tabla made with the original goatskin and steel/iron/wood are assured for long-life.

The Accessories of Tabla

The main two accessories of Tabla are two drums. They are named as dayan and bayan. Dayan drum is placed and played towards the right-side and bayan is the big sized drum that is played on the left-side.

Dayan:

Dayan is the small sized drum compared in the duo. It is usually played in the dominant hand. Dayan is basically made up of hollow wooden structure that produces deep and intense vibrating sound. This drum is customary and the tuning wedges are held in sides of the drum by leather straps or nylon straps that are meant for tuning the instrument. Depending on the wedges that are beaten upwards or downwards by the tuning hammer, the sound acquires lower or higher pitch. The fine-tuning is set by beating on the woven ring (drumhead) by tuning hammer. The tuning of dayan depends on the diameter of the skin. The smaller the skin of the diameter is, higher the sound and bigger the skin is, lower the sound when tuned. Speciality of dayan is, whether the pitch is lower or higher it is played together with the corresponding high or low melody instruments. The size of the dayan that are commonly prepared is 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

Bayan:

Bayan is a spherical shaped drum. They are usually either made of steel or bronze/copper. Bayan made of bronze is used for Carnatic music whereas steel body of the bayan is used in Hindustani music. It resembles a shape of kettledrum. It is larger in size and low-pitched drum which produces a sharp crisp sound. Bayan is played by index finger or the middle finger of the left hand and when in need both the fingers are used simultaneously to play bayan. While playing by two fingers, the ball of the thumb finger rests slightly on the edge of the skin to modulate the pitch by slightly pressing the skin. The size of the bayan that is usually prepared is 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

Along with these drums there are few more typical accessories that comes by, they include some spindle shaped cylindrical wooden pieces that are inserted within the lining leather straps that run vertically from the top skin screen till the base. Various kinds of tabla sets such as ordinary velvet cloth, tabla pillow covers, cloth rings called as 'Bira' used for placing the drums upon while playing tabla for ample amount of stability are available to beautify the instrument tabla.

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History of Tabla

Though the Vedic literature that dates back to thousands of year's mentions about the instrument, still the statistics however says that the instrument tabla is originated from ancient Egypt. Also several authors since 13thcentaury stated that Sufi poet/musician Amir Khusro was the artificer of this instrument. It is also claimed that Sidar Khan Dhari, a court musician in Delhi room during eighteenth century invented the accessories of Tabla. But there is proper evidence that claims about the origin of tabla. The only certainty is that tabla fuses Arabic, Persian and Turkish influences with the indigenous Indian drums.

The artists in their private musical gatherings developed the personal sophisticated solo repertoires that paved way for the creation of the tabla gharana lineages. In North Indian music, tabla is widely used instrument and is classifies under the membranophone family of instruments. The two main gharana styles appreciated in North Indian music are Dilli Baj and Purbi Baj. Being totally different in their techniques and music composition these two gharanas have received a great identity in their own style. There are further more six other gharanas or the traditional schools of tabla that are noted by the great musicians are Delhi, Lucknow, Ajrara, Farukhabad, Benaras and Punjab gharanas. These six gharanas are also unique for their specific bol techniques and tabla positioning.

During the days of royal patronage gharana traditions were important to uphold and was their secrecy was maintained. But today in the contemporary world, tabla players combine various aspects of gharanas to create their own free style. Thus some professionals say that the tradition of gharana has virtually broken as the training methods and the changing lifestyles have made it almost impossible to maintain the lineage purity. However the tradition of performing a tabla solo is cherished in a unique phenomenon at the art of drumming and continues to grow as the journey goes on with the time.

Tuning of Tabla

Calibration of tabla cannot be considered as a simple job. It requires immense attention to listen the notes made on tabla. Every tabla is formed for an exact musical key that is C,D,G etc. Once the tabla is standardized, tanpura is used to make a drone sound with the correct pitch. This way it will be easier to match the drum pitch as one tunes round the fringe of the tabla. There are numerous masters of Tabla. Some of the notable names are Kisan Maharaj, Allarakha and others.



Shantha Tabla Works – Manufacturers and re-conditioner of Indian Percussion Instruments.

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Tabla (Dayan) made of wood and leather membrane.

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Artisan Mr. Srinivasa Anantharamaiah playing Tabla (Bayan and Dayan).

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Tools and Raw Materials

Following are the tools and raw materials required for Tabla Making:

- **Leather:** Leather acts as the sounding skin by fitting over the top of the drum's body.
- **Nylon Straps:** Nylon straps are used for winding around the wooden body of the instruments to tighten the ends that helps in tuning.
- **Charcoal:** Charcoal is one among the main ingredients used for preparing karane / syahi.
- **Adhesive:** Synthetic adhesive is mixed with karane and applied at the center of leather covering the drum.
- **Cooked Rice:** Cooked rice is the ingredient mixed with charcoal for preparing karane.
- **A Metal Ring:** A metal ring is placed below the spherical shaped metal drum and fixed to it for creating an appropriate base for tabla/ Bayan.
- **Neem Wood / Jackfruit Wood:** It is used for making the body of the instrument mridanga.
- **Big Sized Steel / Brass Bowl:** It is used as the body for the instrument tabla/Bayan.
- **Compass:** Compass is used for drawing the precise circle on the leather.
- **Pen / Pencil:** It is used for markings.
- **Cutter:** It is used for cutting the required leather and also to chop off the unnecessary leather.
- **Water:** Water is used for soaking the leather overnight.
- **Limestone Powder:** Limestone powder is added to water while soaking the leather in it overnight.
- **Basalt:** Basalt, a smooth stone used for rubbing karane every time it is dried completely.
- **Hammer:** Hammer is used for tightening the nylon straps of the instruments.
- **Small Wooden Bits:** Small wooden bits used in making of Dayan drum for tuning purpose.

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- **Sticks:** Sticks of approximately one centimeter is used for getting the precise pitch in the instruments.
- **Castrol Oil:** Castrol oil is used for making mridanga to ease the making process/purpose.



Goatskin is used for making 'pudi', the drumhead.



Charcoal powder and basalt stone for syahi and polishing.



Water is used to soak the leather.

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Lengthy leather straps for weaving around the 'pudi'.

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The wooden body of the instrument mridanga made of neem wood.



Caster oil is applied on the left side opening of the wooden body of mridanga.

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Customized tools, which are used for table making.

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Making Process

A set of drums that are tonally rich and harmonically complex are used in variety of musical genres ranging from devotional music to folk, filmy and fusion. Perhaps they play the most eminent role in accompanying the Hindustani and classical music and also play as a solo instrument in Hindustani classical form. These drums are designed and developed in a unique way. The making of the two drums, namely dayan and bayan are very interesting.

The word tabla is commonly used for a pair of drums but which is not appropriate when checked with the strict definition because the smaller drum on the right side is the tabla and it is also called as dayan whereas the larger left hand drum is called dagga or bayan respectively.

Making of these drums get initiated by constructing the primarily complex part of making the drumhead, known as 'pudi' plays a vital role. And the making of pudi is same for both the drums in Tabla. To prepare pudi, the right piece of goatskin is selected. Here the thickness of the goatskin is very important. The shoulder part of goatskin is usually used, as it is soft and uniform in thickness. This skin is further cleaned and de-hired. It is further soaked in water with the tinge of limestone powder, over a night. Later it is dried, marked and cut as per the requirement in a circular manner for various sized drums. In this process of cutting the goatskin, when the drum's mouth measures of about 7 ½ inches then the skin for covering its mouth is cut about 9 ½ inches. The skin is usually cut two inches extra than the precise measurement of the opening, to meet the requirement in a better-ordered manner. Here the best quality skin is separated and used as the main material. The remaining skin is used as the backing material and also used for making the outer covering of pudi. It is later cut into continuous strap material to assemble pudi to tabla and dagga.

Further the making of this drumhead can be divided into three parts:

1) The membranes. 2) Weaving. 3) The black spot.

1. The Membranes: The resonating membrane consists of two components. They are (i) Maidan and (ii) Chat.

(i) Maidan is the only inner layer that covers the entire opening of the drums. It is an important part of pudi.

(ii) Chat is the top most layer of the skin that covers the outer periphery of the sounding surface. This serves for dual purpose. It is an important part of the resonating membrane and on the other hand it gives mechanical strength for weaving. This has a great effect upon tonal quality of tabla. Thus the chat is laid on top of an intact skin (the main playing skin-maidan) and fixed to it. And at the centre of chat, a circle of two or three inches in diameter is cut and removed.

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The maidan and chat that are fixed to each other is then stretched over the mouths of the drum shells and tied securely. Though the attachment between chat, maidan with the drum shell is not stiff enough at this stage, during the weaving process 'gajara' the attachments between them gets stronger and sustains the stiffness.

2. Weaving: This part of weaving is called as 'gajara'. It is a heavy ring of woven leather or rawhide that is woven into pudu around its boundary. It functions as a tensioning hoop, which transfers the tension from lacing to the sounding skin by fitting over the top of the drum's body. The invisible layer of skin that is inside the surface of pudu is called as 'bharti' that provides the mechanical strength for pudu. And the outer hemmed layer that is visible is called as 'hindige'.

The weaving gets begin by making the vertical slits around the edge of tabla. In bayan sixty-four slits are made and in dayan forty-eight slits are created. Further weaving gets initiated actually by inserting lengthy leather straps into three adjacent slits to wrap the rim all around. Step by step the leather straps are weaved by inserting them in two slits and twist them in clockwise manner and pull out on third slit. By repeating the same procedure gajara is weaved until the last slit where the starting point of weaving had begun, there the weaving is stopped and all the leather straps and chat are pulled tightly and the steps are carried out for more times and the excess of leather is then chopped off to complete the weaving part. Thus the drumhead 'pudi' is prepared and kept for drying in sunlight for a day. Later it is mounted to the drum shell. In dayan it is small wooden body of the drum that is mounted with drumhead whereas in bayan it is the big steel body that is mounted with drumhead. These drums bayan and dayan are fixed with their respective drumheads using nylon straps along with the handcrafted base of the drums attached and are wound all around the drums firmly in a vertically manner.

3. The Black Spot: It is called as 'karane' or 'syahi' that is spotted at the centre of pudu. Probably it is the most distinctive part of the tabla. It is the most important component in determining the tonal color. The Syahi is prepared by adding cooked rice to charcoal powder and kneaded thoroughly to get the required consistency and rolled into a doughy ball. Further it is mixed with synthetic adhesive and applied on the exposed surface of the maidan. Using the forefinger of the right hand small quantity of the mixture is taken and applied quickly in a circular form, approximately 3 ½ inches for dayan and 4 or 4 ½ inches for bayan. The circle is allowed to dry in sun. Once the syahi is dries, it is rubbed repeatedly by a polished piece of basalt. This polishing is very important, as it will help in determining the density of cracks that are visible in syahi. Thus repeatedly four or five layers of syahi is applied and once it's dried it is rubbed thoroughly after every application. Then the diameter of the application is reduced until the layers are almost half an inch or until the desired thickness and shape is attained. One thing that is a must to keep in mind is that syahi will always be thick in the centre compared it at its edges. Usually the thicker syahi resonates lower frequency than the thin one. The other point of this syahi is, it is applied in numerous thin layers that covers up all the cracks and considerably covers the particular area of the skin. It is also obvious that the ingredients of syahi harden to the consistency of cement when dried.

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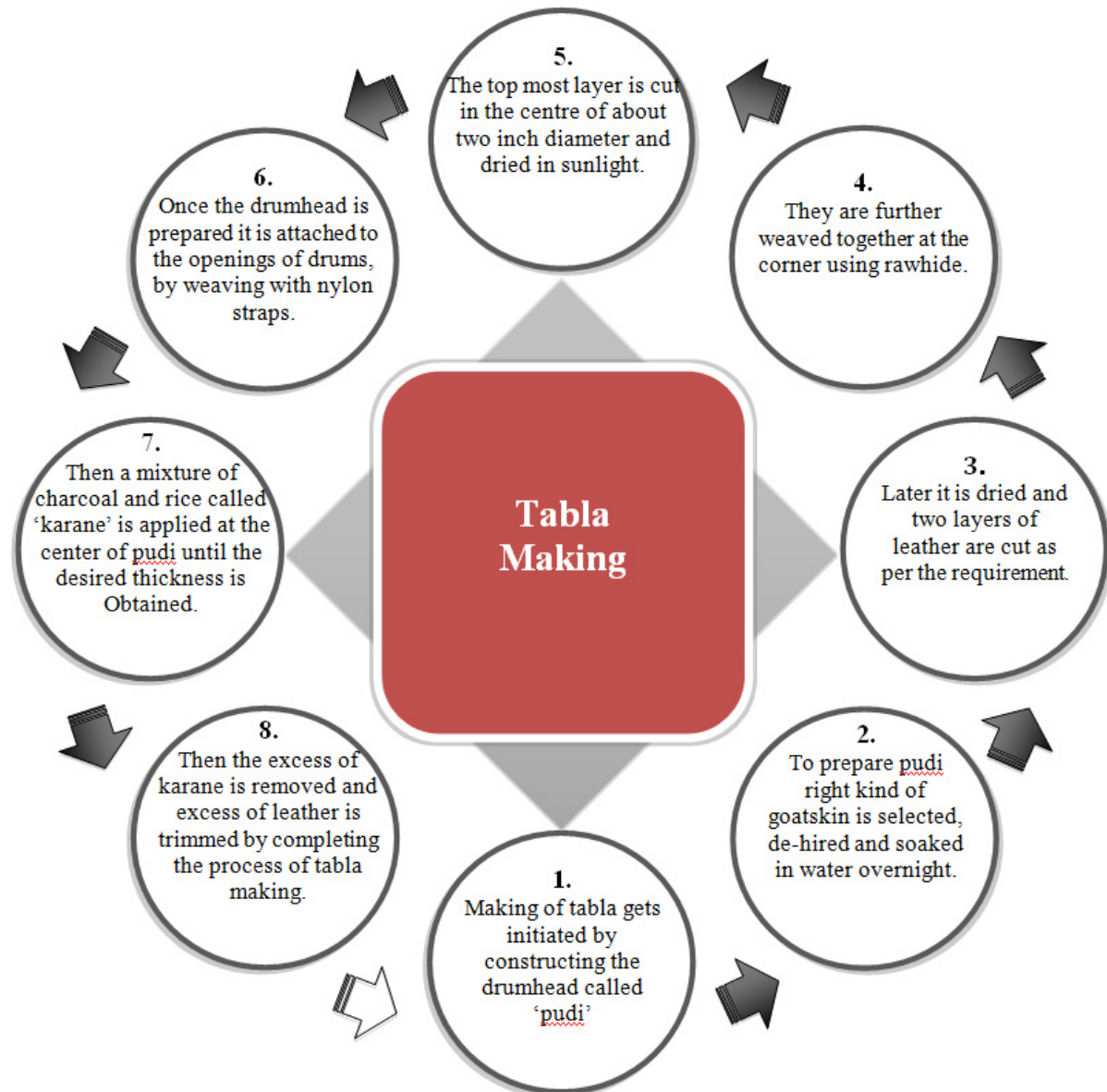
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As the final construction of dayan and bayan, the excess of syahi is scrapped out with a blade. Chat is trimmed while maidan is protected from blade by bamboo piece carefully. Chalk powder is then applied on chat and maidan and sanded lightly with the sandpaper to make the instrument look neat and clean.



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A selected goatskin is cut and the unwanted layer is removed by using sharp tool.

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Cleaned and soaked goatskin is marked and cut as per the requirement with the help of pencil and scissor.



Artisan making hole on the cleaned and marked goatskin.



Goatskin is attached to the metal body of the table.



Unwanted layer is removed using a customized sharp tool.

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Artisan marking on the goatskin for weaving.



Sharp tool is used to make small slits for lacing.



The edges of the leather strips are cut to obtain a thin edge.



Leather strips are inserted through the slits and twisted and then pulled out.

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Leather strips are added between the twisted strips to make pudi or drum head.



Metal rings are added by passing the rope through the ring to join the pudi and the metal body of the 'Bayan'.



Measuring the wooden body of the Dayan using metal scale.



Unwanted or extras are removed by using sharp scissor.

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Leather strips are tightened by pulling them with the help of customized hooks.



The edges are again weaved for the stiffness and endurance.



Applying syahi masala at the center of the pudi or table head.



The 'gatta', made of wood is added between the leather strips for tuning.

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Artisan testing by playing (fine tuning) both the Bayan and Dayan.

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Products

Indian music is always appreciated for its presentation of cultural heritage for centuries. The brilliant form of Indian music is portrayed in several ways of musical instruments that are found in India. Apart from being popular in India, tabla is also well known among other countries of Asia. The instrument tabla being a part of Indian classical music, it has also made a mark on devotional, theatre and also in film music. It is a much-sought instrument in multicultural and fusion musical experiments. It consists of two drums namely dayan (wooden drum) and bayan (steel/bronze drum) that are manufactured at Shantha Tabla Works at Bengaluru. The other instrument that is manufactured at this shop is mridanga as per the individual's requirement.



Array of finished tabla (Bayan and Dayan) instrument.

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Video



Tabla Making Bengaluru - Part 1



Tabla Making Bengaluru - Part 2

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You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

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