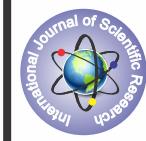


## IMPORTANCE OF TABLA IN MUSICAL TRADITION OF INDIA



## ARTS

**KEYWORDS:** MUSICAL TRADITION, TABLA, INDIAN MUSIC, PERCUSSION

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### ABSTRACT

*The Tabla is a widely popular South Asian percussion instrument used in the classical, popular and religious music of the continent. The instrument consists of a pair of hand drums of contrasting sizes and timbres. Tabla is the most widely used percussion instrument in North Indian music and is classified under the membranophone family of instruments. Its distinct and unique sound makes it an integral part of Indian music. In the Indian durbars of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Muslim Tabla performers accompanied instrumentalists, vocalists and dancers. The Tabla is a traditional Indian music instrument that is used to maintain metric cycles of set compositions. North Indian music is incomplete without Tabla. It gives a beautiful beat and forms an important part of Indian music. The Tabla has changed a lot over the years especially with the modernization of many traditional instruments.*

Music can be a social activity, but it can also be a very spiritual experience. India has a very rich musical tradition. There is no single genre of "Indian music"; instead, there are numerous genres of popular and classical and folk music. Furthermore, there is an extensive variety of musical instruments. Ancient Indians were deeply impressed by the spiritual power of music, and it is out of this that Indian classical music was born. Indian Instrumental Music has its own fundamentals which are based on prior experiments of the contemporary artists of that time. This revolution has also encouraged new experiments in different aspects of Indian Instrumental Music. New experiments results in the invention of new thought patterns, new practices, new structures and new ways to act. The earliest written evidence shows that Indians divided music into two classes. On the one hand, there was ordinary music for the enjoyment of the masses. This is opposed to a music whose purpose was for spiritual uplift. The spiritually oriented music is routinely translated as "classical music" while the ordinary music is routinely translated as "non-classical". So, for those who take it seriously, classical music involves single-minded devotion and lifelong commitment. The basis for Indian music is "Sangeet". Sangeet is a combination of three art forms: vocal music, instrumental music and dance. Although these three art forms were originally derived from the single field of stagecraft, today they have differentiated into complex and highly refined individual art forms. Many of the Indian classical ragas are derived from folk tunes from various parts of India, and most of the other popular and light-classical music forms in India are based on classical music. The Natya Shastra discussed in great depth an extremely developed system of stagecraft, music being an important aspect of the study. There was also a system of rhythm described. Musical instruments have an important place in Indian Music. The music of India is a pervasive influence in Indian life. It pervades the big and small events of Indian life, from child birth to death, religious rites and seasonal festivals. Originally, not all developments of music were reduced to writing. The art of playing musical instruments in India have been traditionally carried on from generation to generation, from primitive stage to this modern age. As Music is a performing art, which is being creative, itself, and cannot be static, hence the gradual developments and experiments have always given new ideas to the modern generation.

The North Indian system of music is known as Hindustani Sangeet or sometimes Hindustani Sangeet. The usual interpretation states that the Hindustani system may be thought of as a mixture of traditional Hindu musical concepts and Persian performance practice. The advent of Islamic rule over northern India caused the musicians to seek patronage in the courts of the new rulers. The fundamentals of the Indian system of rhythm are important. This system, known as Tal or Tala. Tala is the second important factor in Indian music. These are rhythmic cycles ranging from 3 to 108 beats. The division in a tala and the stress on the first beat, called sum, are the most important features of these cycles. Tala is independent of the music it

accompanies and has its own divisions. The Indian concept of a beat is not very different from the Western, except for the first beat. This first beat, known as Sam, is pivotal for all of north Indian music. Aesthetically, it marks a place of repose. It also marks the spot where transitions from one form to another are likely to occur. During the nineteenth century, the musical genre called dhrupad began to fall out of fashion as other styles, such as Thumri and Khayal became increasingly popular. Tabla lent itself better to these new styles.

The most popular musical instrument used in North India is the Tabla. The Tabla is made of wood and whereas its head is made of stretched animal skin. Fine tuning of Tabla is done by striking the rim of the Tabla with a small hammer. The Tabla has an interesting construction. The Dayan (right hand drum) is almost always made of wood. The diameter at the membrane may run from just under five inches to over six inches. The Bayan (left hand drum) may be made of iron, aluminium, copper, steel, or clay; yet brass with a nickel or chrome plate is the most common material. Undoubtedly the most striking characteristic of the Tabla is the large black spot on each of the playing surfaces. These black spots are a mixture of gum, soot, and iron filings. Their function is to create the bell-like timbre that is characteristic of the instrument. The Tabla is actually two drums played by the same performer. Both drums have compound skins onto which a tuning paste, or Siyahi, is added to help generate the wide variety of tones these drums can produce. The bayan is the larger of the two drums and is generally made of metal or pottery. The Siyahi on the bayan is off-center, which allows the performer to add variable pressure on the skin, changing the pitch of the instrument with the palm of his or her hand while striking it with the fingertips. The smaller drum is called the Dahini, or sometimes referred to as the Tabla. Dahini are usually made of heavy lathe-turned rosewood and provide much higher pitch sounds than does the bayan.

In Indian music, generally, there are three elements. The elements are the melody, drone, and the rhythm. The melody is provided by an instrument of the Sushir vadya (blown air), Tantri vadya (plucked stringed instruments) and Vitat vadya (bowed instruments). These three instruments have the ability to play Indian melodious modes known as Ragas. A simple definition of raga provided here can never do full justice to define what a raga really is. The second element is the Drone. The drone is a simple note held constantly. The function of the drone is to help provide a constant pitch. This helps vocalists find their tonic. Drones are found in instrumental music either by a drone instrument or in the melody instrument itself. The Tanpura and Sruti box are the most commonly used instruments to act as drones.

The final element is the rhythm. The proper word for rhythm is tala. This comes from the Hindi word, "Tali" meaning "clap." This provides the time when the raga is played. Tabla is a tala episode. Pakhawaj, Mridanga, Khol, and Dholak are other instruments used to keep tala. As this is a course in Tabla, talas will be our primary focus.

Tabla has a position in both Rag and Tal. When numerous Tabla are tuned to the notes of the scale, entire melodies may be played. However, the most important use of Tabla is to provide the Tal. It is in this capacity that most people think of the instrument. Indian music is traditionally practice-oriented and until the 20th century did not employ written notations as the primary media of instruction, understanding, or transmission. The rules of Indian music and compositions themselves are taught from a guru to a shishya, in person. Thus oral notation, such as the Tabla stroke names, is very developed and exact. However, written notation is regarded as a matter of taste and is not standardized. Thus there is no universal system of written notation for the rest of the world to study Indian music.

Tabla is the most famous percussion instrument of North India. It is most commonly used in North Indian classical music, but its versatility in all musical styles has enabled it to become the most popular percussion instrument in all of India. The level of sophistication and tonal beauty it possesses has elevated the instrument to an unmatched status in the world of percussion.

Indian percussion is more than notational and rhythmic theory; there is also an extensive theory of composition. Although Tabla is famous for its improvisation one must not think of improvisation in Western terms. It is never totally free-form but rather an extemporeous composition within well defined rules and compositional forms. The Tabla provides the rhythmic base for the entire performance. Since the main performer will constantly refer to the Tabla, it is essential that there be a conventionally established pattern that may be universally understood. This pattern is called Theka. Too much variation from the established Theka may lead to a breakdown in communication and thus compromise the entire performance. In the old days, vocalists and instrumentalists would not allow their Tabla players to play anything except Theka. Today there is much greater freedom, still the basic responsibility remains. *Tabla* solo is yet another facet of this instrument and is a unique phenomenon in the world of drumming. Seldom does one come across a single percussive instrument holding its own for hours, accompanied only by a melodic refrain, which marks each of the beats of the *tala*. This is possible only due to the rich repertoire of compositions, which stands witness to the creative genius of the artistes who have experimented with form and tonal colour and have opened new vistas for percussion music. It is in this situation that the interpretative ability of *Tabla* players is challenged.

The size and shape of the Tabla set have changed drastically in the last seventy to eighty years. According to musical iconography and extant museum collections of instruments from the nineteenth and early twentieth century's, the right-hand drum was considerably larger than it usually is today, and the left-hand drum was much smaller, bringing the two closer together in terms of diameter and pitch. In the twenty- first century, there is a revival of dhrupad which encourages Tabla players to keep larger right-hand drums on hand in order to mimic the sound of the Pakhāvaj.

India is the root of various adorable and tuneful musical instruments. Favourable popularity of which is of profuse nature in this contemporary time. Recognition of these musical apparatus are not only limited on the domestic boundaries. Even the global singers and musicians are influenced and delightfully adored by these instruments. *Tabla* one of the most significant apparatus and the magnanimous rhythmic device can thus be related with Indian music at its best.

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