

Design Resource

Tabala Making - Varanasi

The Most Famous Rhythm Instrument

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Manasa K. H.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/tabala-making-varanasi>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
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Introduction

Meaning of Tabla:

TA: tabla or rhythm

B: Bola or words used

LA: Laya (speed, temp, or flow)

There is one opinion that in about 13th century Amir khusoro had invented sitar and tabla. The other version is that there was a rhythm instrument known as a tabla which used to be played during some special festivals, ceremonies and wars as a signal in Arabic region. Therefore, it is said that table is the result of Atabla.

Tabala is the most famous rhythm instrument in Indian Subcontinent, including India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Srilanka. Tabala is known as a queen of drums and percussion instrument, it is the most popular Indian rhythm instrument. A complete set of tabala includes two drums. The right hand, smaller high-pitched drum is Dayan and the left hand, larger metal one called Bayan. These two instruments are almost always played together. Both drums have a body that is closed at the bottom.

Craftman Babu says from the age of 8 years, he is into tabala making and he has learned tabala making from his grandfather Nehmath ullah and it is their family business.

Bayan:

The Bayan takes on the bass part of the drum duo. The body of the Bayan is mostly made of Brass. The Bayan is played by the index finger and middle finger of the left hand in turn or with both fingers simultaneously. While doing this, the ball of the thumb rests lightly on the edge of the skin or modulates the pitch by slightly pressing the skin.

Parts of Bayan

- Maidan
- Syahi
- Gajara
- Baddhi
- Aadhar
- Chatti
- Kuri

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The Dayan:

Dayan's are made of different varieties of wood. The most used and well-known wood types are shrisham, Neem, Mahogany and Babla Wood. The tuning wedges that are held by leather straps at the sides are meant for tuning the instrument. Depending on whether the wedges are beaten upwards or downwards by the tuning hammer, the sound gets lower or higher. A fine-tuning is done by beating with the tuning hammer on the woven ring around the skin. The size of a Dayan is defined by the diameter of the skin. Sizes of 5 to 6 inches are in use. The standard sizes are about 5 1/4 inches to 5 1/2 inches whose tuning is around C. The measurements can also be given in centimeters. The tuning of the Dayan is also depends on the skin diameter. The smaller the skin is, the higher is the sound of the Dayan; the bigger the skin diameter, the lower it can be tuned. Specially low or high Dayan is played together with corresponding high or low melody instruments.

Parts of Dayan

- Maidan
- Syahi
- Gajara
- Gatta
- Aadhar
- Chatti
- Lakri



A set of small and large bayan.



The drum head - Shaihi, maidan, chanti and gajara.

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The Tabla.

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Tools and Raw Materials

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

- **Goat Skin:** Its used to make straps.
- **Brass:** Its used in Bayan making.
- **Sheesham Wood:** Its used in Dayan making.
- **Chisel:** Long bladed hand tool with a beveled cutting edge.
- **Cutting Plier:** Diagonal pliers used for cutting of straps.
- **Soft Cover:** Its used to cover delicate drum heads from being damaged.
- **Tuning Hammer:** Its used in tuning the tabla.
- **Syahi Masala:** Mixture applied on the membrane to produce the sound from the instrument.
- **Pointed Chisel:** It is used to pierce hole in the leather sheet.



A set of gatta that are fixed to the tabla.

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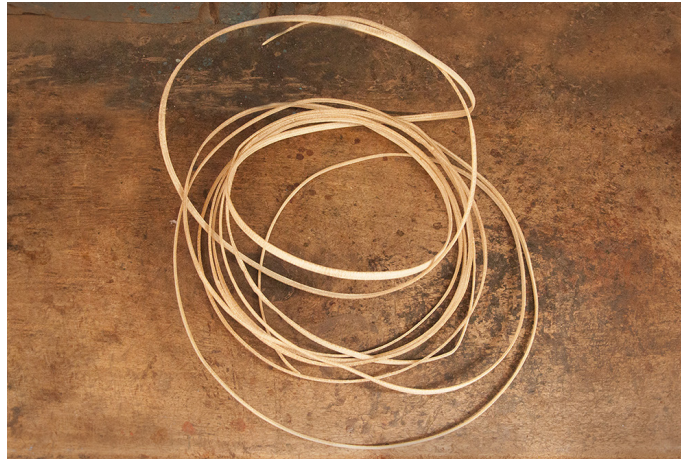
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The lace helps to tie the pudi to the shell (tabla).



Flat chisel that helps artisan in cutting.



Tools that are helpful to the artisan.



Pair of padded rings that help place the tabla and bayan.

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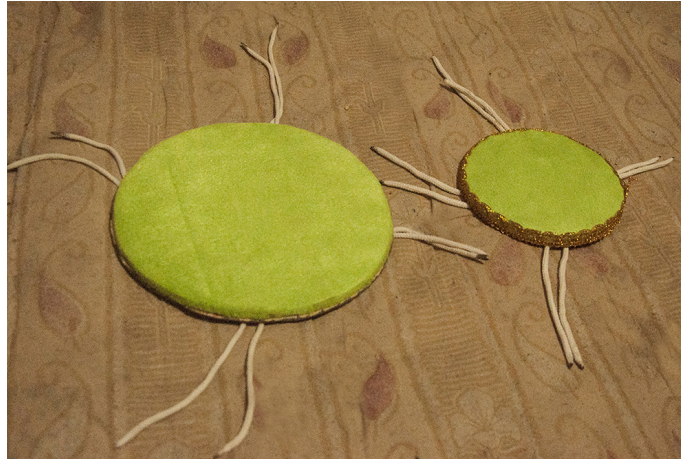
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Covers that save drum head from getting damaged.



Fiberglass is best to transport tabla and Bayan.



A pointed tool to make holes that helps in tieing pudi to the drum.

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Making Process

Making of Dayan:

Another important factor is the density of the wood depending from which part of the tree the wood is taken (upper or lower portion of the trunk) or if the wood is taken from a thin trunk. The thick trunk, which is a good wood, widely used in furniture industry in case of wood like Shesham or Neem.

Once the wood has been selected it is roughly chiseled into the desired shape and is placed on a lathe. The lathe completes the job of shaping the wood. The wood is then removed and the process of hollowing begins. It is hollowed out by using simple gouges and chisels. A large portion at the bottom of the drum is left intact so that the weight of the wood is as great as possible. The wood is now ready for seasoning, which simply involves placing the wood in a cool, dry place for a period. The purpose of seasoning is to allow the wood to dry out. This drying process must be done as slowly as possible or cracks will develop.

Making of Bayan:

Body of the Bayan are mostly made of Brass. The other kinds of metals, which are used in tabla making are mostly brass, steel, and rarely aluminum. Brass is the mostly preferred metal for Bayan making. The equal sized rectangular shaped metal is cut and joined together. The two ends are joined by crimping and the next step of making a cylindrical metal into round shape begins by beating it off with mallet. Once it has been rounded enough it is joined to the bowl-shaped bottom, it will be crimped and welded together by applying a mixture containing a metallic powder called dag. The shell is now placed on a lathe and polished until all the dents are gone, then later it is plated with chrome.

Syahi Masala:

Syahi is the tuning paste applied to the head of many south Asian percussion instruments like the dholki, tabla, madal, mridangam, khol and pakhavaj.

Syahi is usually black in color; circular in shape. The black spot on the Indian drum is the most important component in determining its tonal color. This black spot, known as shai (shahi, gaab, or ank) contains a commercially available black powder known as masala. The ink that is smeared on the top of the Tabla is usually a mixture of iron particles, gum, dough (of rice flour) and catechu etc. It is smeared in the center of the skin and is called as GAB. It is a fine art to apply this GAB in the correct mixture, consistency and strength of a paste. Once the mixture is applied, it is let to dry in sun.

Finally it is polished with a stone immediately after the excess paste has been removed, a polished piece of basalt is used to rub the syahi repeatedly.

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Carved Drums of Tabla on the left. Metal drum-part of Bayan.



The drum head comprising of shaihi, maidan, chanti and gajara.



The drum head is being fixed.



Rope is being tied to fix the drum head and the base.

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Tan (lace) is tied through the holes that pass through the drum head.



The lacing of tabla and Bayan.



Thread is inserted in the chanti (periphery) to fine tune.



Masala (syahi) tuning paste is spread off centre for higher pitch.

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Syahi is rubbed with the stone to spread it evenly and help fine tune.



Gatta is being added to the tabla.



Sanding drum head.



Completed Tabla on the left and Bayan on the right.

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A set of tabla and Bayan kept in case and covered with soft covers.

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Products

- **Bayan:** Bayan shells are usually made of aluminum, steel, brass and copper metals. The larger metallic drum placed around the rim of the drum shell under the main sounding membrane. It is always placed on left side.
- **Dayan:** Dayan is made usually made of Shesham wood. The smaller wooden drum. It is usually placed on the right side.



A close view of Tabla placed on padded ring.



A close view of Bayan.

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A set of Tabla arranged one on another.



A set of tabla and bayan.



Case that helps to carry tabla and bayan.

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A side view of the tabla.



Collection of Bayan drums.

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Video



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You can get in touch with

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