

Design Resource

Terracotta Dagga - Agartala, Tripura

Tabla Making

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/terracotta-dagga-agartala-tripura>



1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
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<https://www.dsource.in/resource/terracotta-dagga-agartala-tripura/introduction>

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Introduction

Terracotta Dagga, a Tabla, is made in Agartala, the capital city of Tripura. By using terracotta as a base, Dagga is being made to get a good base and clear pitch in the hall of musicians. Music has influenced our life from the ancient days, and tradition still follows them. The musical instruments are always used to support music.

The Tabla is an instrument consisting of a pair of drums used in traditional, classical, and popular folk music. The smaller drum, played with the dominant hand, is sometimes called Dayan (literally “right”), dāhina, but is correctly called the “Tabla.” The small table is made from a conical piece of mostly teak and rosewood hollowed out to approximately half its total depth. The larger drum, played with the other hand, is called Bayan (literally “left”) or sometimes Dagga, Duggi, or Dhama. The Dagga may be made from different kinds of materials. Brass is the most common, copper is more expensive but generally held to be the best, while aluminum and steel are often found in inexpensive models.

The name Tabla likely comes from tabl, the Persian and Arabic word for drum. Generally, in the Northeast region of Bengal clay is used, although not favored for durability. Terracotta is a red clay-based baked ceramic, usually unglazed. Initially, the clay sculptures were dried in the sun after being made. To make them harden they were placed in the ashes of open hearths, and finally, kilns were used, similar to those used for pottery nowadays. It has been a particularly important instrument in Hindustani classical music since the 18th century and remains in use in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.



Junior artisan playing Dagga to examine the final tuning after completion.



Ranjan Rishi, a senior artisan from Agartala who makes Tabla (Dagga).

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Tools and Raw Materials

Tools and raw materials that are used for making terracotta dagga are:

- **Goat Hide:** It is used for making the head of a tabla.
- **Clay Dagga:** It is used as a base for the Bayan and Dayan (Tabla).
- **String Rope:** It is used to tie the head and base of Dagga together on the transitory.
- **Castor Oil:** It is used to apply on stripped leather for easy friction.
- **Buffalo Skin:** It is stripped and used to connect the head and bottom of the Dagga.
- **Chisel:** Long bladed hand tool with a reduced cutting edge.
- **Cutting Plier:** It is used to tighten the leather strips
- **Pointed Chisel:** It is used to pierce a hole on the leather sheet.
- **Syahi Masala:** It is used to apply in the middle of the sheet as a black circle for the different patterns of tone on the same sheet.



Rawhide of a goat used to make the head of the drum.



Rawhide is soaked in water.

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The terracotta pot is the main raw material used for making dagga.



Thong made of thick buffalo hide.



Charcoal smeared on rawhide makes the variety of sounds and modulations possible.



Cooked rice and water are heated and mixed to make glue.

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Various kinds of chisels and cutting tools are used for making Dagga.

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Making Process

The process starts with the head of the Dagga, a fine goat's hide is taken. The craftsman draws a circle by using a pencil on the goat's hide in a required measurement. The hide is cut according to the drawn shape by using a chisel. It has to be cut in such a way that it should be even in all the angles. After that, the hide is soaked in water for a few minutes to make it soft. Then it is taken out from the water, and the outer layer is cleaned by using an iron metal tool. The circular pieces of goatskin are now graded as to quality. The lowest grade will have the centers removed and used to make the outer covering of the head. The medium grade is used for low cost, student grade tablas, while the highest grade is used for professional quality. The head is known as Chat. The Chat must now be made. The lower quality skins are utilized by folding them in half several times to form a triangle. The tip is cut off so that when it is unfolded, there will be a circle of about two to three inches in diameter that has been removed. A clay base is kept as a base of the lead part of the instrument. A strip of buffalo skin is rolled and kept under the bottom of the clay base. A string rope is used to tie the Chat and the base tightly. Even the stripped buffalo skin has been soaked inside the water for a few minutes. Once it is taken out a castor oil is applied to the strips, which will help sew the strips easily.

By using a pointed Chisel, holes are made on Chat one by one, and the striped skin is woven from the hole to the bottom rolled skin. Once the weaving around the Dagga is completed, the craftsman makes sure it is tight enough to hold it firm. The weaving begins by making vertical slits around the top edge of the Tabla. The Bayan requires 64 slits while the Dayan requires only 48. Care must be taken that all layers of the skin have been penetrated. Four long pieces of buffalo hide are used for the weaving. Each thong is first soaked in the water, and then lightly covered with castor oil. The four thongs are inserted into four adjacent holes up to their midpoints, thereby making four loose ends. There must be a central core around which the Gajara is woven. Taking four lengths of an inferior quality leather thong and wrapping them around the rim. The craftsman hammers the rim for stiffness. Syahi is the tuning paste applied to the head of the Dagga. 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 Syahi (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 the sun.

Finally, it is polished with a stone immediately after the excess paste has been removed, a polished piece of basalt is used to repeatedly rub the Syahi. A magnificent music instrument's process is completed, and it is named as Tabla.

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A layer of goatskin is made up of small overlapping pieces to add strength.



The circles are marked and then cut, and the unused sections are cut into trapezoids of varying sizes.

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Once the rawhide is wet, excess hair and tissues are removed, and the whole is allowed to dry.



The mouth of the terracotta pot is covered with rawhide.

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The terracotta pot and the rawhide are tied securely with the rope.



Buffalo hide is rolled and tied to the base of the terracotta pot.

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A rope is being tied to fix the drum head and the base.



Lace (Buffalo hide) is tied through the holes that pass through the drum head.



A pointed Chisel is used to pierce a hole in the leather sheet.

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Partially completed Dagga.

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A stone is rubbed on the upper part to spread it evenly and help in fine-tuning.



Charcoal stone is made into powder.



The ink that is smeared on the top of the Dagga is usually a mixture of charcoal, cooked rice and starch.

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A fully completed Dagga polished with a stone.

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Products

Senior artisan Mr. Ranjan Rishidas; is making Tabla in almost a day to get it completed. The price range of the Dayan cost around 1,500 INR, and Bayan cost around 2,500 INR. A set of Tabla costs around 4,000 INR.



Close view of Dagga used to play classical music.

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Video



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This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

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