

Design Resource

Veena Making - Bobbili, Andhra Pradesh

String Instrument

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Parvathi Pooja

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/veena-making-bobbili-andhra-pradesh>



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Introduction

The origin of the Veena can be traced to India's Vedic period. In Hinduism, traditional music has been an integral part of performance arts. Markandeya Purana and many other Puranas have theories of music. It can be found in Natya Shastra, a Sanskrit text credited to sage Bharata Muni. It is the oldest surviving ancient text on classical music and performance arts in which Veena is discussed. The Natya Shastra describes a seven-string instrument and then explains how the instrument should be played. One can always see Saraswathi, the goddess of art, and learning with Veena and a book in her hands. Veena is the favourite instrument of several important deities. The Veena handled by goddess Saraswathi is known as Kachchapi. The size, structure, shape, and tuning have all changed from time to time, and the Veena at each stage has had a different name and has sounded different.

Nowadays, Veena is about 4 feet in length. Its design is made up of a large resonator carved and hollowed out of a log, a tapering neck topped with 24 brass or bell metal frets set in scalloped black wax on wooden tracks, and a tuning box culminating in a downward curve, and an ornamental dragon's head. If Veena is made out of single wood it's called Ekantha Veena. There are four main strings and three subsidiary strings on the Veena. Yedathore Subbaraya Sharma had written and published a book in Kannada 'Sandhyavandaneya Thathvartha Vedaprakaashike', which tells the significance of the Veena.

The art of playing the Veena varies from region to region. The style of playing the Veena is called Bani; the four distinct styles known are Thanjavur, Mysore, Travancore, and Vizianagaram. Each of these places produced extraordinary musicians who set trends for others to follow. Each of these artists had styles that were characteristically different from one another and had marked differences. This particular individualistic quality that each performer had to his playing is called 'Bani'. Bani is nothing but a style that is cultivated carefully over some time by a set of people or one person. This style or Bani is then passed over to the next generation of disciples.

Depending on the Bani, the making of a Veena also varies to some extent. Let's take an example of Vizianagaram; Andhra Pradesh also has a tradition of Veena making in a place called Bobbili in the present Vizianagaram district from where the instrument derived its name Bobbili Veena. Bobbili is a place of historical importance as it was once a princely state and was ruled by kings upon a time. The rajas of Bobbili were also patrons of the fine arts. They encouraged Veena making, and in those days, Bobbili produced great musicians. In Bobbili village, a couple of families are into Veena making; the Veena they make are procured by the Craft Development Centre and sold to the outsiders. Now let's see how this Bobbili Veena is made.

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Artisan with his family.



Artisan examining the product.

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Artisan displaying his wooden works.



Artisan involved in carving the Veena.



Craft Development Center, Bobbili.

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The working area of the artisan.

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Group of artisans.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Tools and raw materials that are used for Veena making are:

- **Bench Vice:** It is used to hold the wood or any material for working on it.
- **Chisels:** These are used to carve or remove material to make designs.
- **Hammer:** It is used to deliver blows on an object.
- **Cutter:** It is used to cut the sheets for the required size.
- **Planning Tool:** It is used to even out the surface.
- **Hand Drill:** It is used to make holes in the objects.
- **Files:** These are used to remove materials or smoothen the surface.
- **Emery Paper:** It is used to remove the rough surface on the contours.
- **Brass and Steel String:** It is used on the Veena, which when struck, produces sound.
- **Brass Fret:** It is used on the Veena, on which the strings rest.
- **Jackfruit Wood:** It is used to make the body of the Veena.
- **Hacksaw:** It is used to cut the wood into the required length.
- **White Plastic Sheet:** It is used in decorating the Veena by inlaying the sheets.
- **Lac:** It is used to add colours to the carved designs.
- **Heating Rod:** It is used to melt the lac and fill in the grooves of the design.
- **Rosewood Bridge:** It is used to support the strings of the Veena.

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- **Measuring Tape:** It is used to check the length of the objects.
- **Wood Polish/Paint:** It is used in the surface treatment of the wood.
- **Aluminum Dome:** It is used as a support on the other end of the Veena to rest it when not in use.



A mixture of beeswax and charcoal powder is used to fix metal frets. Brass metal frets are fixed on the fingerboard.



Pegs and knobs are made of rosewood.

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Lac colours.



Surface grinding tool.



The Jigsaw machine is used for cutting the wood.



Scale for measuring.

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The powder used to polish the Veena.



Chisels used for cutting wood.



Beeswax is used to fix metal frets.

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Brass String.



Soldering gun used for melting lac.

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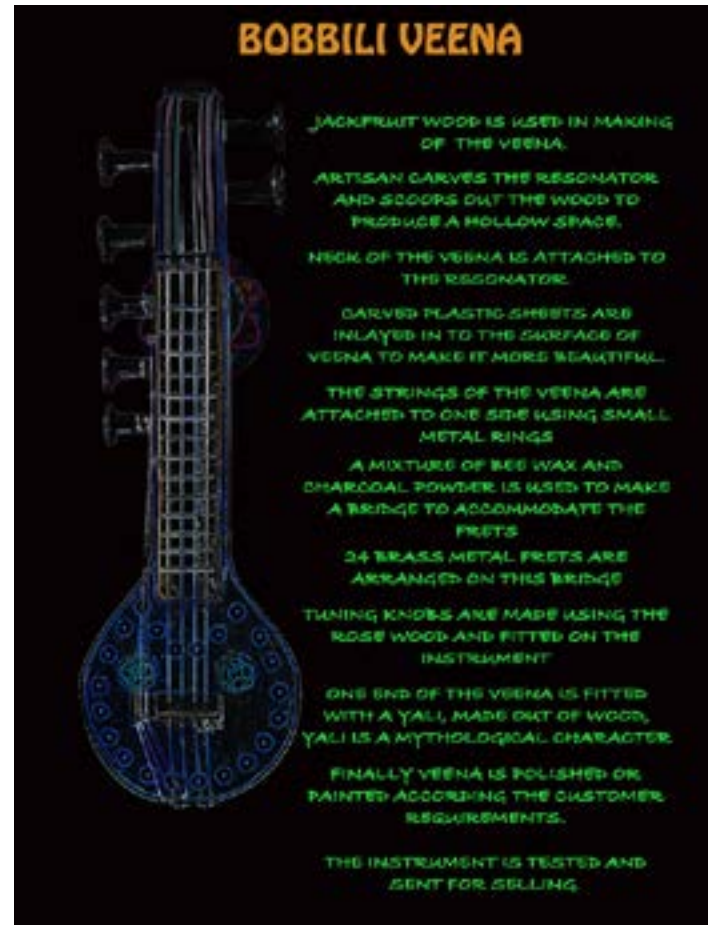
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Making Process

Flow Chart:



Big Sized Veena



Miniature Veena

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Big Sized Veena

Veena is made out of jackfruit tree wood, which is lightweight and possesses qualities like excellent reverberation, clear grain lines, and great durability. The woods are seasoned by placing in shades. The accurate size of the wooden log is chosen and cut. The Veena has three major parts: resonator, Dandi (neck), and pegbox and design in the front known as Yali. A resonator is a big bowl where the sound is produced. It is hand-carved using a custom-made handheld scraping tool, which is capable of removing large chunks of wood. This process is carried out only by hand and requires great skill, expertise, and experience. The quality of the music largely depends on the proper making of the resonator. The finished resonator appears like a big bowl. The resonator has a top cover used to cover it. This cover is made out of the same wood. A small table like a wooden bridge, topped by a convex-shaped brass plate, is glued in place with resin, and this bridge is fixed on the resonator cover. The Dandi (neck of the Veena) is attached to the resonator; the Dandi (tapering hollow-neck) is a U-shaped lengthy wooden piece of approximately 51inch in length and width is 3 ½ inches, which is hollow inside. The hollow curvature of the Dandi is covered on the top by a board on which the fingerboard is fixed. The fingerboard is fixed on the Dandi using nails. The fingerboard consists of 24-brass frets set in a mixture of scalloped beeswax and charcoal powder and a tuning box culminating in a downward curve and an ornamental dragon or yali head. The distance between the brass frets is fixed by checking for the musical note by plucking the strings. At the end of the curve is the small box with a cover, which holds the plectrums. On the sides of the Dandi are the tuning knobs made out of rosewood used for tightening the strings. There are two sets of tuning knobs five numbers on one side and two on the other. There are seven strings on the Veena, the first two strings are of steel, and the other five strings are made out of brass. One end of the string is tied to the tuning knobs, and the other end of the string is tied to the tailpiece, which is a metal piece in the form of a shield that is screwed onto the main resonator. The four main strings press against the wooden bridge. Apart from the main body, certain brass and bronze parts are crucial for holding the wooden parts of the Veena together, improving the tonal quality and adding to the aesthetic value of the instrument.

There is a lot of decorative inlay carving on the body of the Veena, which has been done on a plastic sheet. Earlier, these inlays were of ivory. The carved inlays are coloured using the lac. The lac is heated and filled in the carving grooves; once it's dried, the inlay is scraped using a blade to remove the excess lac, which leaves only the grooves filled with colours, and the design appears. Depending on the customer's requirement, the Veena is painted or polished. Once it is ready, the Veena is sent for tuning. It takes around 20 days to make one complete Veena.

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Jackfruit wood is used for making Veena.



Artisan cutting the wood into the required shape.



Initially, the design is done using a pen/pencil on wood.

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Measuring is done using a compass.



Calipers are used to measure the thickness of the wood.



The inner part is gouged out.



Paper is cut to make holes and design on veena to give an elegant look.

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The basic form of a lion's head is carved.



Lion head after carving.



The wood is scooped out to make it hollow.



The rough sketch of the design to be carved is traced on the Veena.

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The design is carved using a chisel and wooden mallet.



With the help of soldering gun lac is melted.



The sheet pasted on Veena is colored with lac.



The design is carved using a chisel.

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Yellow colour powder is painted on the Veena.



Pegs are attached to the end of the veena.



One end of the string is tied to the tuning knobs, and the other end of the string is tied to the tailpiece, which is a metal piece in the form a shield that is screwed on to the main resonator.



A metallic clasp along with a cubical wooden log is fixed on the Veena.

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Plastic material is nailed on the lion's face to make the eyes of the animal.



Plastic material is glued to make teeth of the animal.



Holes are drilled on the clasp.



The bridge is fixed on the resonator.

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The four strings that traverse the brass frets are tied which are called Sarini, Panchama, Mandhara, and Anumandhara.

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Hooks are used for tying the strings.



Beeswax and charcoal powder is stirred well to make the paste and to fix on the Veena's neck.



Wax and charcoal powder is heated to make a thick solution.



Once the thick solution is made it is kneaded well.

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A long narrow band of kneaded wax and charcoal powder is fixed on veena's neck.



Brass frets are fixed on a the veena.



The fingerboard consists of 24-brass frets.



Artisan examining the sound quality of Veena.

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Artisan with the final product.

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Miniature Veena

The Bobbili Veenas of smaller sizes are also made. This miniature Veena is used as a souvenir or as a showpiece. It's smaller than the actual Veena. These do not have any functional aspect, and they cannot be played. The miniature Veena size can be as small as 9 inches to 23 inches in length and 3-4 inches in width. The making procedure of the miniature Veena is similar to the actual one. Depending on the size of the Veena, the resonator is made into a solid or hollow one. If the Veena is small, the entire Veena is carved into a solid one. If the Veena is big, then the resonator is made into a hollow one so that the weight is reduced and it's easy to carry around. It takes around 1-4 days to make a miniature Veena. The finished Veenas are placed in a glass enclosure with a wooden base.



Jackfruit wood is used to make Veena.

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The basic shape of Veena is made.



Wood is cut vertically to make the body of Veena.



The excess wood is scrapped.

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The required shape is formed.



Artisan smoothing the resonator part of veena.



Fixing the wooden plate.



The upper part of veena is nailed using chisel and hammer.

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Holes are drilled.



Stickers are used to decorate the veena.



The surface is smoothened.



Miniature Veena is painted by mixing the pop powder, adhesive and yellow colour powder.

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A box is made with wood and glass to place the veena.



Overview of the box.



The miniature Veena ready for sale.

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Products

Bobbili Veena is invented and developed in Bobbili in the 17th century during the reign of Pedda Rayudu. The Veena length is approximately 53 inches, and the diameter of width is about 15 inches, and the height is approximately 12 inches. It weighs around 10 kilos. The cost of the Veena sold to society is approximately INR 20000. Miniature Veenas are also made as a showpiece or decorative items. The miniature Veena size can be as small as 9 inches to 23 inches in length and 3-4 inches in width. The miniature Veena costs approximately from INR 800 onwards.



Bobbili Veena with lion's head carved at one end.

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Showpiece / Miniature Veena.



Big size Bobbili Veena or Saraswathi Veena.

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Peacock Veena - wooden miniature musical instrument.

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Video



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