



Indian Instrumental Music

Instrumental music also occupies an important place in Indian music. It is one of the three aspects of Sangeet and has a very ancient history. The Indian instrumental music is known as “Vadhya Sangeet”. The following are some examples of the many instruments in the different categories.

Membrane Percussive (Avaanaddh)

This is a class of instruments which have struck membranes. They are typically comprised of drums.

❖ Tabla



The “tabla” is a pair of drums that consists of a small right hand drum called “dayan” and a larger metal one called “bayan”. The dayan is almost made of wood whereas the bayan is made of iron, aluminium, copper, steel or clay. But the most commonly used is brass with a nickel or chrome plate.

The most striking characteristic of tabla is the large black spot on each of the playing surfaced. These spots are a mixture of gum, soot and iron fillings and their function is to create a bell-like timbre. The tabla is believed to have evolved from the “pakhawaj”.

❖ Pakhawaj



The “pakhawaj” is actually the North Indian version of the “mirdangam” and is the most common member of the class of barrel-shaped drums known as “mirdang”. It has a right head which is identical to the tabla but it is slightly larger. The left head is also similar to the bayan of the tabla except that there is a temporary application of flour and water instead of the black spot which is permanent.

The pakhawaj was once a popular instrument but in the recent generations, the tabla has gained more popularity.

❖ Mirdangam



The “mirdangam” is essentially a South Indian version of the pakhawaj. It is superficially similar to the pakhawaj. However, there are major differences in terms of construction, technique and tone.

The mirdangam has a heavy annular membrane around the right side and a number of pieces of straw which are placed radially between the annular membrane and the main membrane. The right side has a permanent application known as the “soru” and the “karanai”. The left side uses a mixture of flour and water, which is removed after each performance. The entire instrument is barrel-shaped and is usually made of jack wood.