

Folk musical instruments of the land

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The *kara* is seen during the Ashura fairs and performances and is played with two sticks. It is also referred to as the 'side drum.' *Nakara*, in olden times, was called the *Dunduvi*. It is usually placed on the ground, or a platform for playing. An essential in Muharram performances, the *nakara* is also used in 'nouka baich' (traditional boat rowing of the region) to control the pace in rowing.

Dhak and *dhol* are often referred to as similar instruments, but these too are different in use and performance. Usually, the *dhak* is one of the most prominent and larger musical instruments. It is carried on one side, and played on one side with a stick or two.

The *dhol* differs from the *dhak* not only in size, but in playing style as well. It is played on one side with a stick,

puja, Baishakh, as well as for any joyous performances and processions.

The *dug-dugi*, an easily playable instrument, can be found in local fairs. The popular instrument is also used to draw attention and used by snake charmers and hawkers. This simple instrument however is also fabled to be the world ending musical instrument, as the Hindu God Shiv is said to play it as the world crumbles!

After string and hitting instruments, the next set of instruments are the wind instruments, or aerophones. The instruments that are part of this type are identified by their tubular build, and are played using various blowing techniques.

The very first mention in the category would be the *banshi*. It is easily the most melodious instrument in any type of local music, and can resonate feel-

Banshi' this one is somewhat similar to the western flute, but the playing mechanism and the instrument itself are different. From Bhatiyali to Bhawaiya to solo performances, the *Banshi* is simply a stand out instrument.

While not used in performances, the *tubri* cannot be left behind. This is commonly known as the 'been,' used by snake charmers for their trade. Made from a dried gourd, the instrument has two distinct bamboo tubes that produce sound.

No grand wedding in the region is complete without the sound of the *shanaï*, which is another much used flute like instrument. A deceptively easy looking instrument, the *shanaï* requires not only proper breath control, but also proper synchronisation of fingers. In ragas, the *shanaï*, when used, is given a solo as a main instrument.

Moving away from the various tubular instruments, the harmonium too falls in this category as it uses wind to produce sounds. Often compared to the western accordion, the instrument is believed to have originated in France in the 1800s.

discs that are slightly raised in the middle. The *kortal* is often paired with the *khol*, and is used to create variations in tempo and sound. The *kortal* can be incorporated into various musical performances, but it has a prominent place in Kirtans.

The *mandira* is often mistaken with the *kortal*, but it is distinct in shape, as it resembles two small bowls that are slightly different in size. It is used extensively in Rabindra Sangeet, as well as in Baul and Kirtan performances.

Clay pots are also used as idiophonic instruments in various performances for a resonant sound. South Indian music is incomplete without the *ghatam*, an upside down clay pot. Locally, this can be seen in any type of performance for that added sound, accompanied by plates. There is a known trend in the Dinajpur region to announce the birth of a child with hitting brass plates.

A highly customisable instrument is the *khat-tal* or Krishna Kathi. Resembling two wooden spirit levels with miniscule discs placed in the holes, the *khat-tal* is used by a wide range of people from performers to hawkers.

Coming to the *ghungur*, the much beloved accessory for classical dancers, it is made up of miniscule enclosed bells made of bronze, copper or in cases silver. While it is not an instrument on its own, when added to a dance, it can create a mesmerising ambience.

In conclusion, it can be said that local instruments most definitely are not limited to the handful that have been mentioned here. For expert musicians, even the simple desk or a piece of brass can be an instrument, if used in harmony with a complete ensemble!

All in all, musical instruments are a sign of how culturally inter-connected humanity really is. As of now, organologists around the globe are yet to agree on a chronological origin of musical instruments, but the lack of history cannot be a factor to not enjoy, and even practice an instrument. It is, after all, through playing and creating music that makes an instrument thrive through the ages.

By Iris Farina
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel
Performance by Joler Gaan
Location: PRAN Premium Ghee-Anandadhara Pitha Fest 2019, Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel



and on the other by hand. It can be played using hands on both sides as well.

A smaller version of the *dhol* is the *dholok*. It is widely used in jatra, and theatre, and immensely popular in Ghazal and qawali performances. *Dhak*, *dhol*, *dholok* — all three are prominently used in performances during

ings of joy to sheer sadness in the hands of an expert player. Although usually translated as flute, the *banshi*, is vastly different from the flute that is used in western music.

Sri Krishna, the grand avatar in Hinduism, is always portrayed with a *banshi* that is played by holding it horizontal to the ground. Known as 'Arr

The *shakh* has a particular place as an aerophone in this subcontinent. Made from a hollowed out conch shell, the *shakh* has origins as a signaller in wars.

In modern usage, the *shakh* is most prominently used in various Hindu religious festivities, as well as an indicator of good tidings. It produces a solid

single burst of sound without any rise and fall in sound. How long the sound will last depends on how long the player can hold his or her breath and blow through it.

Another instrument that has its origin in wars is the *shinga*, or the horn. Originally made from buffalo horns, the *shinga* can also be made from wood. This instrument too, is used in local festivities like Chaitra Sankranti, and Ashura.

Moving away from the various tubular instruments, the harmonium too falls in this category as it uses wind to produce sounds. Often compared to the western accordion, the instrument is believed to have originated in France in the 1800s.

Of course, the form that we are familiar to took much time to evolve, but over the centuries, the instrument has become a standard for the beginners to experts. Not only is it used for essential vocal practices, but also for practicing classical dance paces. The harmonium and the *tabla-baya* are quintessential for any and all classical performances throughout the region.

The last segment on this journey of musical instruments would be the idiophonic or autophonic instruments. These types of instruments produce sound without any strings or membranes. The entire instrument body is used to produce sound. These instruments are used to mainly keep pace and add a unique dimension of sounds to the other main instruments in a performance.

The *kortal*, made up of two tied brass



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