

A Study of Tsuzumi, A Japanese Instrument

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Abstract

An analysis of Folk Drums of South India, comparing with that of Japanese Folk Drum Tsuzumi. Indian Folk Drums like Udukkai, Idakkai, Tudi, Damaru, Timilai, Deru, Thavandai have been compared with this Folk Drum of Japan.

Keywords: Dhundubi, Bhoomi dhundubi, Ko-Tsuzumi, O-Tsuzumi, Taiko, Kawa, Shirabe, NOH Theatre, KABUKI Theatre, Nara Period, Horse Hide, Zerkova Wood, Kaname, Cherry Wood, Waisted Drum, Tudi, Damaru, Udukkai, Idakkai, Timilai, Huruk, Deru, Thavandai, Abcem, Buddudke, Hour-glass shaped Drum

The sense of music in Japan has traditionally not been focused on Melody, and there is very little use of Harmony. They focus mainly on Rhythm. Hunter-gatherers from ancient times were always known to produce music from the 'Twang' of a bow, which results in a melodic sound. But, the farming ancestors of the Japanese apparently, began with the percussion instrument. They dug a hole in the Earth, placed boards over it, and stamped it to make sounds. This was called dudubii, believed to be the origin of the modern word for Drum PSUZUMI. DUDUBII and PSUZUMI sound alike, and the letters du-du and su-zu, double-up, in the same way. This preference for percussion instruments over Stringed Instruments necessarily strengthened the tendency towards a Rhythmical Music of sounds by dividing time, rather than melodic music of sound flowing through time. From this unique music of Japanese, "NOH" was formed. We could call it a monochromatic sound world.

Like this, in India, the oldest form of rhythm probably evolved from the Stamped pit. The drums mentioned in Vedic literature are Dhundubi and Bhoomi Dhundubi. There was a hollow in the ground, covered with barks or planks, on which men and women stamped or beat with sticks. Eventually, the bark might have been substituted by the animal hide. One such instrument was Bhoomi Dhundubi, which is mentioned in the Vedas. It is a ritual drum, comprising a pit in the ground, with the Hide of an Ox stretched across the pit, with the Hair and the Tail intact. The Tail was used to beat the membrane. The name Dhundubi of India is also very similar to the name Tsuzumi of Japan.

Tsuzumi of Japan:

There are three types of Drums used in Noh; The Ko-Tsuzumi, O-Tsuzumi, and the Taiko. The Ko-Tsuzumi, though the smallest of the group, is the most Important drum in Noh and is one of the unique Japanese contributions to the world of Music. All the Noh Drums consists of five parts: a wooden body (Do), two skins (Kawa), and two sets of ropes (Shirabe), which hold the skins to the body. This is a traditional hour-glass-shaped drum. Of the family of Japanese two-headed drums with hour-glass-shaped (waisted) bodies, the most commonly used Tsuzumi is the

KO-TSUZUMI and the O-TSUZUMI, found in the music of NOH and KABUKI theatres. Although the KO-TSUZUMI and O-TSUZUMI are quite similar in appearance, how they are played, and the sound - the tone they produce, are quite distinct. TSUZUMI generally consists of two Leather skins, each sewn onto an iron ring, larger in diameter than the Drum body, then laced with ropes onto the lacquered wooden drum. Though several kinds of hourglass drums are introduced into Japan from continents before the Nara period 710-794 AD, today, the word Tsuzumi refers to O-Tsuzumi (big Tsuzumi) and KO-Tsuzumi (small Tsuzumi). Both these drums are played with the right hand and fingers.

Ko-Tsuzumi

It is a small hour-glass shaped drum. Both heads of the Ko-Tsuzumi are made with horse hide. The two heads have animal skin stretched on a metal rim, each with an outer vibrating skin and an inner reverberating skin. These are positioned on either end of a hollow wooden hour-glass-shaped body and held in place with an orange-colored hemp chord, laced through holes along the rims of the head. Ko-Tsuzumi is played by grasping the tuning chords, with the left hand holding the drum, up at the right shoulder, and sounding the drum by striking it with the right hand. A unique feature of this drum is that the pitch and the timbre, can be changed by varying the tension exerted on the chords with the left hand or even by changing how many fingers of the right hand is being used to strike the drum. The skin used for the shoulder drum is horse hide, has a smaller circle of deer skin, called the tuning skin, which is affixed to the inside. This tuning skin affects the pitch of the drum. To get the best sound from the instrument, the Ko-Tsuzumi skins should not be too dry. Hence, during any performance, the drummer will frequently apply bits of saliva-wetted paper to the back skin.

The body of the Ko-Tsuzumi instrument is made out of Zelkova wood. Just like we hear how a good-sounding Violin is made from carefully chosen wood, from just the right tree, this wood also must come from just the right tree, grown in just the right place. Inside a good drum, there are hand-carved special patterns, called Kaname, which are deemed very

important for the drum's tone. The subtle difference between the back skin and the playing skin is that a very small patch of deer skin is placed inside the center of the back skin to control the reverberation. This gets the tone of the drum to be the best possible. Another control is exerted by small patches of paper, which are applied to the outside of the rear skin, immediately opposite to this inner patch. The quantity of these papers being applied depends on the weather, the tension of the ropes, and perhaps the discretion of the player. The application and the paper's wetting is a puzzle to many a newcomer to a Noh performance. It feels as though the drum and the musician are having a conversation. One set of the Ko-Tsuzumi rope holds the two heads of the drum against its body, while the other set is looped very loosely around the drum. By slightly squeezing this encircling rope, the required tension is created on the skins, which raises the drum's pitch. We can distinguish the school of the drumming of these musicians just by looking at the way they hold the ropes of the drum.

Sounds and Playing of Fingers

There are five basic sounds of the Ko-Tsuzumi instrument. They named Pon, Pu, Ta, Chi, and Tsu.

Pon is the sound produced by striking the center of the head. Two or Four fingers of the right hand are used to make this sound, depending on the drumming school. The ropes are held loosely by the musician until the moment of impact when they are quickly squeezed to produce a lovely fluid waver to the tone. The coordination of striking this sound, and the perfection of this technique, can be called the piece-de-resistance of Japanese drumming.

Pu sound is very similar to Pon but sounds lighter, probably because it is played with only one finger.

Ta sound has a wonderful crack to it. It is produced by hitting at the edge of the head with two fingers while the player exerts maximum tension on the ropes.

Chi sound is a lighter version of the Ta, played just with the ring finger.

Tsu sound is executed by leaving the hand on the front-head and allowing the rear head to produce the tone.

O-Tsuzumi

This is the large drum or the Hip Drum, which is also called the O-Kawa or large skins. This drum makes a higher, sharper sound and does not have a variable pitch, as the Ko-Tsuzumi. For about an hour before the performance, the Cow hide skins are heated on both sides, over a small brazier, to make them dry and tight as much as possible. After that, they are fixed firmly on the body of the drum. Cosmetic tuning chords are added. The Instrument is usually held on the left hip, and it produces a cracking sound when one head is struck with the central finger of the right hand. The head and the rim are very hard, so the index and middle finger of the right hand are protected with hard paper thimbles, and the palm is protected with a small piece of leather. This also intensifies the sound the emanates from the instrument. While Ko-Tsuzumi shows changes in pitch and tone, the O-Tsuzumi, constituting the O-Kawa music, shows variations in the strength of the beat and the duration of the resonance. In NOH, and in plays where there is an absence of the Taiko drum, it is the responsibility of the O- Kawa to signal the performer with specific beat patterns and to conclude the accompanying instrumental music.

Cherry or Chinese Quince is said to be the best wood for O-Tsuzumi, and the inner-carving is comparatively simpler. The rope system of the O-Tsuzumi begins with one set, which holds the heads very tightly against the body. The second rope is looped through five strands of this binding rope and pulled together to make the body even tighter against the skins. There is an extra rope that serves only as a decorative function, draped from the drum, onto the floor in the front, and behind the player.

Sounds and Playing

Tone control for the O-Tsuzumi comes from proper movements of the entire arm. The basic three sounds are Chon, which is the strongest; Tsu, which is the weakest; and Don, which is produced by leaving the hand on the drum after the impact, and letting the rear head produce the sound, very similar to the Tsu beat, of the Ko-Tsuzumi.



Tsuzumi of Japan

Indian Hourglass-Shaped (Waisted) Drums

Among the stretched membranophones, the percussion instruments with bifacial (2 heads) waisted drums are also very ancient, though today they are confined to folk and temple music. It is not certain whether the Indus valley civilization was acquainted with such membranophones. However, a terracotta figurine has been found, which is that of a woman carrying on her left hip, a drum-like object, encircled by her left arm. It could have been a waisted drum resembling a large Udukkai of today.

In our country, the sacred association of the Damaru with Lord Shiva is familiar. The drum connotes the Primeval Naada, the origin of creation. Vedic literature does not refer to any waisted drum. But from ancient Tamil literature, we infer that hour-glass shaped drums like Udukkai, Itakkai, Timilai, Damarukam, Damaru, and Tudi, were used and even today, they are seen in South India. Some of the waisted drums struck with the hand are the Abcam, the Timila, the Huruk, the Deru, the Udukkai, the Idakkai, the Thavandai, and so on.

1) Dhundubi: This instrument is mentioned in Thirugnana Sambandhar Thevaaram (6th Century) and Sundarar Thevaaram (8th Century).

a) Kaalaiyodu Dundubiga LSangu kuzhal yaazh --- 3-72-3

b) Kotti Paadumith Dundubiyodu kuda muzhaa --- 7-49-6.

Deva Dhundubi finds a mention in Thiru murugaatruppadai of Nakkirar - Thirumurugu - 119. It is also called "Andara Dhundubi."

2) Udukkai: Today, Udukkai is used by the priests, mostly in Durga Temples in Tamil Nadu. It is also called Damarugam or Damaru. This is also mentioned in Thevaaram (6th Century), Thiruppugazh (15th Century), and Silapathikaaram (2nd Century). In this instrument, the pitch is maintained by the left hand. Hence, it is also called Idakkai and Dakka. We find Idakkai used mainly in Kerala. The big size Udukkai is named Thavandai.

Even today, it is used in temples like Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai.

Udukkai is a waist drum. Its body is made of wood or Brass metal. The two heads contain stretched goat skin, held tight with ropes. The Pitch of the instrument can be changed by pressing on the rope. It is played with the right hand. Udukkai is seen in sculptures of many temples in Tamilnadu. Lord Shiva, depicted as Kangalamurthy and Bikshaadanaar in Temples, is shown as holding and playing a very big Udukkai in his hand.

3) Tudi: Sangam literature mentions - "Tudi yerium pulaiya" (Puranaanooru 287-1). "Tudi aadal" is one of the 16 varieties of dances performed by Madhavi in Silappadigaaram. Though Tudi has two faces (Heads), only one head, namely the right-head, is used for playing.

In Andhra Pradesh of South India, the Reddy community uses a big waist drum Abcem, and a small Buddudke.

Timila of Kerala (a state of South India) is about 55 to 75 cms long and each face is 15 cm in Diameter. The heads of this drum are covered with a goat's skin, and the membrane is kept taut by rope braces. The players suspend it from the shoulders and beat only on one face, with their hands.

The Huruk or Hudukka, and the Deru, produce very similar sounds as Damaru and Udukkai. They are all waist drums made of wood or Brass, with Length about 25 cm, and the face diameter about 15 cms. The Parchments which cover either side of the instrument is held very tight by means of ropes and is played by beating on them, with fingers or a small stick. The tonal variations of this instrument can be achieved by squeezing or pressing the chord at the waist. This chord runs over the longitudinal rope braces, connecting the two membranous faces. The instrument is always held in one hand and struck with the other hand. The hand that holds the middle of the Hudukka is used to press or release the chord, which increases or decreases the hide's tension, which in turn, changes the pitch.

Similarities - Japanese and the Indian Waisted Drums

1) Traditional Names:

Japanese name - Dudubii Indian name - Dhundubi
Dudubii and Dhundubi both are made with hiding covering pits, and stamped on to make sounds.

2) Shape and structure:

Japanese Tsuzumi and Indian Udukkai or Damaru are similar in structure, both of them being hour-glass shaped waisted drums

3) Materials used in the making:

They are two-headed Drums with stretched skins that make up the heads. The correct wood from the right place is used to make the body of the instrument as well.

Ko-Tsuzumi - Horse hide with Deer skin inside

O-Tsuzumi - Cow hide

Indian instruments use cow or goat hide.

4) Playing Methods

The drums are held high up, on the right shoulder, and the tuning chords are grasped with the left hand

Sounding the drum by striking it with right-hand finger

5) Pitch and Timbre Changes

Pulling or tugging on and releasing the chords, modifies the tension exerted, hence changing the pitch and timbre. This is done with the left hand.



Damaru of Tamilnadu

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