

Drums of India: An Ethnomusicological Perspective

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As somebody put it, “any object capable of producing sound is potentially a musical instrument!” This sounds reasonable enough, but perhaps drums need to be purposefully and deliberately ‘made’! Man’s first instruments might have been hand-claps, body-thumps and whistles etc. but he soon graduated to create numerous instruments. In the process he has displayed great application, craft and imagination. Drums spread world over are evidence to his creativity and productivity.

The English word ‘drum’ is derived from ‘trump’ and the derivation may not really provide a clear idea of functions drums normally carry out or structural features particular to them. Generally as an instrument drum is described to consist of a hollow pot/pitcher/cylinder/pipe or a frame over which skin is tightly stretched. Sticks/rods/hands/fingers etc. are used to activate drums i.e. to strike on the stretched skin resulting in production of various sounds.

However it has been pointed out that some primitive drums do not have a stretched skin etc. to cover the frame or cylinder. For example in a typical drum of this kind a tree-trunk or its lower part is carved or hollowed, or a niche is carved in it to create a cavity. This ‘drum’ is then struck upon to generate sounds. Organologists may perhaps maintain that this kind of ‘uncovered’ instrument sounding in the way it does needs to be classified as idiophonic (because the whole body acts as the main vibrator).

Drums are expectably ancient. Sumerian vases, dating back to 3000 BC have depicted drums as tall as a human being! Drums dating back to 1800 BC are preserved in Egypt and Chinese poetry of 1135 BC has reportedly referred to drums. Drums come in various sizes and shapes and may attract attention even on this count! Greece reportedly imported drums from eastern countries/cultures and these were known as ‘tympanum’. Significantly Dionysus and Sybil employed drums in their rites—that were often ecstatic in nature and created trance situations. Such non-musical roles of drums must be remembered to understand their full significance.

A Change in Title

For my exposition initially I had thought of using the title ‘Drums in India’. However the title had to be changed “Drums of India”—at least for three reasons: (1) In view of the culture-based nature of the inquiry the primary aim is to concentrate on ‘traditional drums’—i.e. drums accepted and employed by Indians in wide-ranging life-contexts over a long period. (2) Secondly, Indian music in its totality flows in six categories of expression: Primitive, Folk,

Religious, Art, Popular and Confluence. Due to socio-cultural reasons the last two categories constantly tend to be in a flux. Hence they change and often bring in new elements that may or may not get stabilized. Obviously these 'floating' elements may also include instruments—in the present instance drums. However, their inclusion for serious consideration may have to wait for obvious reasons—as a lexicographer does before including a new word in a dictionary. (3) Thirdly, and more fundamentally, drums among all other instruments are creators and communicators of the aspect of rhythm—an aspect of music which has closer connections with other forms of life. Discussion of non-Indian or non-indigenous drums may be linked to consideration of changes of greater cultural import. Before such an attempt is made a firm baseline needs to be provided—which the present exposition hope to achieve.

Two Possible Directions of the Inquiry

Thinking of Indian drums leads predictably in two directions—firstly to a music-based examination and secondly to a culture-oriented inquiry. Music-based inquiry inevitably displays bias of musicology and organology—the latter being a discipline specifically dealing with all issues connected with musical instruments. Finally, music-based inquiry turns to the main musical function of drums—that of providing rhythm. The second i.e. culture-oriented investigation concentrates on contexts in which drums operate. The aim is to shed light on the not-so-obvious implications of interrelationships between drums and life-contexts or perspectives. As music-thinkers and especially ethnomusicologists rightly point out, musical instruments are music-makers as well as cultural objects functioning as carriers of socio-cultural messages. In addition, compared to voice, instruments wander/migrate with discernible ease and they also cover large geographical territories. Drums are no exception. Hence they can and need to be studied from multiple angles.

Some Leading Myths: Indian drums

There is an ancient tale related to an important and ancient Indian drum. On a very cloudy day Sage Swati went to a pond to fetch water. It soon began to rain heavily. Swati patiently watched the rains coming down. The rain drops striking on the big, medium and small sized lotus leaves produced different and pleasing sounds. Retaining the memory of these sounds and contemplating about them Swati sought help from Vishwakarma—the cosmic engineer—and made Mridang in the first instance and then other different drums to successfully reproduce sounds he had heard with rapt attention and in great rapture.

In a rather abstract manner another ancient drum called Damaru (an hour-glass-shaped drum of made wood with both faces covered with skin) is mythically associated with Lord Shiva. He used it when he performed his cosmic and all-destructive dance called Tandava Nritya. Interestingly his playing of Damaru is also connected to emergence of fourteen aphoristic rules which created language. An intriguing feature is that Damaru is also played by animal-trainers—especially those engaged in giving street-performances with bears and monkeys.

Yet another ubiquitous Indian drum is Dhol. The Shabar tribe in Orrisa has a thought-provoking myth linked to it. According to the myth in the beginning Man had no instruments and he could not convey messages to other members of the society—even when somebody was born, got married or died. So Kittung (the God) thought hard and decided to create music. He therefore made one drum—called Dhollun—by using hide of a buffalo to cover the face of the drum and the other—called Dagdan—with cow's hide to cover the drum-faces. Since then drums were pressed into service to announce to the society every momentous event.

Dhol—an ancient drum has many myths associated with it—and the linkages require attention. Indira Goswami in her book *Chinnamasta* describes dhol in its multiple aspects. In Assam three style of playing dhol-s are current and they are respectively known as *telutopi vadya* टेलुटोपी वाद्य, *bat-bolni vadya* बाट बोलनी वाद्य, and *samabandhano vadya* समा बंधनो वाद्य. The art of constructing dhol is described in a song and the description brings out different kinds of symbolism associated with it. Only brown, red, blue and green colours are applied to the dhol. Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka taught the craft of making dhol to a carpenter whom a leather-worker (born from the semen of a clothes-washer) helped during the four mythological ages known as Satya, Dwapar etc. to make Dhol. This carpenter in fact made three drums namely Dhol, Mridang and Khol. On no-moon day a cow is killed in the Southern direction and the leather-worker dries the skin on a pillar set up in the ground. The pillar is divided in five sections to construct the dhol. Multiple playing styles with non-musical functions, demon—association, low-castes' involvement in making drums, killing of cow regarded sacred in many parts of India and ritualistic construction of Dhol are features to be noted.

These brief narrations of drum-related myths must be regarded illustrative and not exhaustive. In fact majority of Indian drums are surrounded by interesting myths suggesting thereby the many-sided cultural roles drums play in India.

What is the moral? Perhaps the moral may emerge or become clear as the discussion proceeds. However, one may anticipate a little and state that these myths collectively suggest that acoustical phenomena, essential features of human creative process, role of contemplation, power of natural forces, human keenness and ability to make/manufacture objects to ensure continued availability of desired experience, craving to share information and joy with others—all appear to have contributed to existence and use of the fascinating variety and multiplicity of drums contemporary India can boast of!

Indian Drums: General Features

A brief statement about Indian drums may begin with a special ancient variety of Indian drum known as Bhoomidundubhi. It certainly merits attention for its extremely 'natural origin'. In ancient India a pit dug in ground would be covered with a tree-bark or animal-hide etc. and striking on (or stamping on it?) produced rhythmic sounds! A more logical account states that the hide used to cover the pit was of a sacrificial bull and his tail was used to

strike the membrane. The fundamental features of a drum—of creating a cavity and covering it—are clearly fulfilled in this case—rather dramatically! But the story becomes more complicated as we move to other drums.

Drums constitute one of the four major classes of musical instruments. The Indian traditional four-fold classification is based on answering one seminal question: what primarily phonates or produces sound in an instrument? This question and the classification resulting from answers to it now function as a universally applicable criterion to classify instruments. Mahillon, the pioneering organologist in the 19th century employed the criterion and since then instruments are classified as chordophones i.e. *tata* (तत), idiophones i.e. *ghana* (घन), aerophones i.e. *sushira* (सुषिर) and membranophones i.e. *avanaddha* (अवनद्ध).

In drums primary vibrations are created by a membrane stretched over a vessel, pitcher or a frame etc. Instruments in this class are therefore known as membranophones. The Indian musicological term for the class is *Avanaddha*. (Sometimes *bhand* (भांड), *bhand vadya* (भांडवाद्य) are used as variants.) Term *Anaddha* (अनद्ध) has also been used alternatively to describe drums. In the ancient *Natyashastra*, Bharata has mentioned that there are 100 *Anaddha* instruments—though he has restricted his discussion to some selected drums from a sub-class called *Pushkara*. The *Natyashastra* eulogizes *pushkara* by stating that it can produce whatever is producible through voice. For example, it can precisely follow the *laghu-guru* (long-short), *yatibheda* (metrical pauses) in the text of a song. Bharata's and most other traditional writers' exposition of the *avanaddha* class holds up *mridang* as the model to be followed to discuss all related matters. The exposition of the actual playing of *avanaddha* in all includes 15 themes / topics in ancient literature. Even if all discussed matters are unfortunately not clearly understood it certainly becomes obvious that drums and what they did was considered very seriously.

It is significant to note that *avanaddha* instruments are specifically mentioned for their inherent capacity to add *ranjakata* (रंजकता) i.e. (colour) to music-making—an unambiguous reference to the recreational value they could add to a bare 'sung expression/rendering'.

Today large number of *avanaddha* instruments operates in India in various musical categories and thus drums enjoy very diverse performing contexts. It must be stated that a great number of individual drums may necessitate separate discussion if their respective distinctive identities and notable contributions—musical as well as cultural—are to be fully appreciated.

Some History . . .

According to Bharata, the archetypal philosopher—theoretician-practitioner of Indian performing arts—from among *avanaddha* instruments, *mridang* (मृदंग) and *dardura* (दर्दुर) are the chief, while *jhallari* (झल्लरी) and *pataha* (पटह) are secondary in importance. That all *avanaddha* instruments are not equally important is also suggested in other ways. For example, it is stated that from *avanaddha* instruments *pushkara* is the most mature. It is stated that Lord Maheshwar used the following *avanaddha* instruments for his *tandava* dance: *mridang* (मृदंग), *bheri* (भेरी), *pataha* (पटह), *bhand* (भांड), *dindima* (डिडिम), *gomukha* (गोमुख), *panav* (पणव), and

dardura (दर्दुर). Bharata has specially mentioned (*tripushkara*) त्रिपुष्कर drum while discussing the *marjana* (मार्जना) procedure—the process of applying paste on drum face to make it sound resonant and allow tuning to different notes for simultaneous playing—indeed a novelty in Indian system of music-making which has been largely melodic.

The three *ang* or parts of the *tripushkara* are mentioned as *vamaka* (वामक) i.e. face on the left, *savyka* (सव्यक) face on the right, & *urdhvaka* (ऊर्ध्वक) upward facing—indicating their different holds.

Yet another ancient source is Pali literature. According to their usage documented in Pali literature, *avanaddha* instruments were described, rather confusingly, as *vitata* (वितत). Another minority tradition subscribed to the view that rubbed *avanaddha* instruments with strings (to which the term *vitata* has a direct reference) are better described as *tatanaddha* (ततानद्ध).

Twenty-three varieties of drum as identified in ancient India are mentioned. Even today majority of them exist in different parts of the country with regional variations. The overall continuity is astonishing: These drums are:

- 1) *pataha* (पटह) 2) *mardal* (मर्दल) 3) *hudukka* (हुडुक्क) 4) *karata* (करट) 5) *ghata* (घट) 6) *ghadas* (घडस) 7) *dhavas* (धवस) 8) *dhakka* (ढक्का) 9) *kudukka* (कुडुक्का) 10) *kuduva* (कुडुव) 11) *runja* (रंजा) 12) *dmamaru* (डमरु) 13) *dakka* (डक्क) 14) *mandi-dakka* (मंडी डक्क) 15) *dakkuli* (डक्कुली) 16) *selluka* (सेल्लुका) 17) *jhallari* (झल्लरी) 18) *bhana* (भाण) 19) *trivali* (त्रिवली) 20) *dundubhi* (दुन्दुभी) 21) *bheri* (भेरी) 22) *nisan* (निसान) 23) *tumbaki* (तुम्बकी).

As if to emphasize the importance of the instruments of this class, fingers with which they are played are allocated certain deities. For example, thumb = Brahmadeva, forefinger = Shankar, Middle finger = Vishnu, ring-finger = all deities, little finger = sages and seers, palm = sun, outer surface of the palm = moon, right hand = Indra, left hand = Varuna.

It is laid down that in dance, *avanaddha* instruments are to be employed in accordance with the playing-styles adopted. These styles are mentioned as: *sama* (सम), *rakta* (रक्त), *vibhakta* (विभक्त), *sphuta* (स्फुट), *shuddha* (शुद्ध).

Linguistic Pointers to Significance of Drums

Cultural discussions related to countries with a long tradition of multilingual society benefit from consideration of terminology. Words referring to parts or components of drums, early etymologies or synonymous listings of drums provide evidence of roles, standing and such other features of drums.

Amarkosha the pioneering thesaurus in Sanskrit of the medieval times:

आनकः पटहो ज्ञेयो डिण्डिमः पणवस्तया ।

कोणो वादनदण्डः स्यात् भेरी दुन्दुभिः इत्येते ॥

Nearly three centuries later Halayudha Kosha is more expansive. It states:

पटह < पटेन हन्यते इति (पट + हन् + ड). पटत् इति शब्दं जहाति पटहः (पटत् + हा + ड). आनकवाद्यम्, पटयति, गमयति योधान् युद्धम् । उत्साहवर्धकत्वात्, युद्धे वाद्यमानं ढक्का, अडम्बरः, समारम्भः हिंसनम् ॥

There are some thesaurus—sources in regional languages too—and if they are consulted some other sidelights on drums as items in cultural perspective may be available. However specimens from classical sources mentioned earlier are adequate to indicate directions in which contribution drums made were noted and registered in language. These references indicate that drums were mainly employed for purposes related with war, ceremonies, marches and processions. The main effect associated with them was encouragement and increase in enthusiasm. It is obvious that this restricted to only certain types of drums. The present scene is complex as well as rich.

Perhaps it would help to note some important structural features commonly found in *avanaddha* instruments prior to attempting a wider discussion.

Bhanda: भांडा H S bhand = body of an *avanaddha* instrument made of metal.

Chaddar चदर : metal sheet

Chano: key screw

Chhalla छल्ला: (H S *challi* = creeper) Small brass rings passed through *rassi* to tighten or loosen *rassi* and hence the membrane, in order to heighten or lower pitch.

Dandi/danda दंडी, दंड: bar

Dhanca ढांचा: skeleton

Gajra गजरा: (H *ganj* = group) A plait of leather or thin rope holding the membrane evenly stretched over the face.

Gatta गट्टा: (H) Wooden blocks inserted under the *rassi* to tighten the latter and thereby increase tension on the membrane.

Ghar घर: (H S *griha* = house) Section of a *gajra* formed by a *rassi* passing through it. Stroking the sections upwards reduces tension on *pudi* and decreases pitch. A downward stroke has an opposite effect.

Ghat/ghada घट, घडा: clay-pot

Ghera/kada घेरा, कडा: (H) A metal ring around which a leather plait is woven.

Ghundi घुंडी, गुंडी: (H S *guntha*) button-shaped knot of cloth, rope etc.

Gittak गिट्टक: (H) small piece of metal, wood etc.

Indavi इंडवी: a ring of cloth to keep/rest an instrument.

Jhanj झंझ: metal disk.

Jhilli झिल्ली: a thin coating, covering.

Khapacchi खपची: a thin strip of bamboo, wood etc.

Khod/ar खोड: (H *kotar* = hollowed trunk of a tree from which body of an *avanaddha* instrument is made.

Kinar किनार : (P *kinarah*) edge of a strip, membrane etc.

Lakdi लकड़ी : wooden stick.

Lav लव : minuscule hair, wool in animal skins etc. used to tan/prepare membranes.

Masala/siyahi मसाला, स्याही (H P *syaha* = blackness) a thin circular coating of iron filings, carbon, boiled rice etc. applied on membranes to improve their timbre.

Mukh मुख : (S *mukha* = face) face of a drum covered by membrane.

Patal पटल : (S, *Pudi*: (H) membrane.

Penda/pendi पेड़ा, पेड़ी : base.

Poolika पूलिका : circular coating of paste.

Rassi/dori रस्सी, दोरी : (H) Small rope of leather or cloth used to stretch the membrane. Leather strips that perform a similar function are called *baddi*.

Shanku शंकू : S a cone-shaped solid body.

Skandh pattika स्कंध पट्टिका : strap going over player's shoulder to hold an instrument.

Udar pattika उदर पट्टिका : Strap going over player's stomach to hold an instrument.

A stage is now reached for taking a closer look at drums if they are to yield their multiple secrets to us! Classification of Indian drums would pave the way for a deeper consideration.

Indian Drum Family: Organological Classification

Dr. B. C. Deva in his pioneering work on Indian musical instruments classified Indian drums as follows:

(A) Struck Drums:

Frame Drums: (1) With one open face, (2) With two faces closed.

Cylindrical Drums: (1) With one face: (a) open (b) closed.

(2) With two faces: (a) Like a straight pipe (b) With a convex belly (c) Waisted.

(3) With multiple faces.

(B) Scrapped or rubbed.

(1) Like a pipe (2) Waisted.

Altogether by a rough estimate there may be 300 drums of various kinds circulating in six categories that make totality of Indian music in the Indian subcontinent today! Perhaps a much complex and elaborate classificatory exercise may be required to do justice to them! However, for the present inquiry a little elaboration on some features arising out of this system would suffice.

Playing Methods

Two general methods of playing drums can be described as striking and scraping or rubbing. Thus, drums may be struck with hands, fingers or sticks etc. Alternatively, scraping or rubbing with hands or sticks etc. on the face or body of the instrument may also provide results. Both ways of playing are not likely to yield 'sweet' sounds—a feature worth noting! Drums or parts thereof can perhaps be imagined to create sound through a plucking action too! However contemporary Indian drums do not appear to be sounded in this manner! The temptation to associate music and therefore musical instruments with unalloyed sweetness is notably great and pervasive! The thrust towards 'non-sweetness' that drums so emphatically register indicates their two-fold contribution. Firstly, even in music they support musical functions that are not directly designed to supply sweetness. Secondly drums underscore their importance in wider cultural contexts in which music—as is generally understood—has no place!

Some important and developmental phases of Indian drums in relation to playing methods are briefly noted here to make the situation clear.

From the ancient to the medieval time—the most important phase was related expectably to Mridang. The early Mridang—consisting of three-components—made an honourable exit and the two-faced horizontally held Mridang/Mardal took its place. Musical utility of this later drum was augmented many-fold when the technique of applying paste on the right face of the drum (to tune it to the desired note) was refined and stabilized. Most probably this feature itself passed through three stages: (1) applied paste was of clay (2) applied paste was of wheat flour (3) applied paste was made from iron filings etc. The composition of the paste and also the technique of applying it were further improved upon. Probably by the 16th–17th century the process was developed to perfection. The rich yield was in resonance, tunefulness and timbre—all adding immensely to musical value of these drums. Prof. C.V. Raman's epoch-making acoustic studies of this phenomenon in 1927 revealed the fact that this pasted variety of drum produced five harmonics!

Another conducting change was replacement of earthen or clay—made instrumental bodies by wooden and metal bodies—though no definite chronology can be marked.

Gradual emergence of Tabla—the dominant and popular drum pair used in Hindustani music also meant more efficient and skilled methods of making membranes with multiple layers—again adding to the acoustic qualities and expressive capabilities of the drum. Indeed Pakhawaj and Tabla stand out as testimony to qualitative evolution of language of rhythm. This evolved language became possible because these drums could produce an astonishing variety of rich sound-syllables (called *patakshara*—in the traditional terminology). It is symptomatic that 'freer' forms of music-making such as *Khayal* also emerged and evolved during the same period as Tabla was coming into prominence. Solo music-making by rhythm instruments and their separate concert-existence could become a reality only when rhythm instruments could boast in independent language of their 'own'. This also led to emergence and growth of forms of rhythm music. Near complete liberation of significant Indian rhythm instruments from their conventional 'accompanying-instrument status' may perhaps be a feature unique to India!

Melodic and Rhythmic Aspects

Instruments are broadly divided in music as instruments capable of providing melody or rhythm. Drums are included in the latter category. As a corollary it also follows that (according to their major rhythmic/melodic function) instruments are also distinguished on the basis of their inherent capacity to produce sustained/continuous or intermittent sound. Drums are predictably included in the latter category. As discussed earlier, drums such as Mridang and Tabla transformed their conventional time-keeping/marking/measuring functions into creative patterning of the temporal aspect and thus gave substance to rhythmic aspect of Indian music.

Onward march from Tempo-marking

Indian rhythm instruments are consequently of two types: those capable of making the tempo (i.e. laya) aspect concrete while the other type, in addition to marking tempo also generate tala—cycles. Tala concept is a highly processed and sophisticated concept in Indian performing arts, musicology, prosody and musical aesthetics in general.

In brief it must be stated that more developed drums in India are capable of discharging three music-related functions: (1) they can mark time, measure it or keep it as required. (2) Drums with sustained sound, distinctive controllable timbre and pitching can invest sound syllables with special configurational possibilities. Thus emerges the tala phenomenon which goes much beyond mere or bare time-division. (3) Finally more evolved drums display their vocabulary of sound syllables and genres, compositions, and styles of elaborating techniques. They leave mere time-division far behind!

Tonal or Atonal

A step further makes it possible to identify certain drums capable of producing sounds acceptable as musical notes and those others that cannot do so. These varieties are respectively described as tonal or atonal. Bharata described tonal instruments as Angavadya and atonal variety as Pratyanga. Drums of both types are widely distributed in India. Drums such as Pakhawaj, Mridang and Tabla are tonal and they are mostly employed in art music. Many varieties of Indian drums are atonal and contexts in which they are employed range from death-ceremonies, trance-situations, execution of 'ordeals' such as fire-walking etc. or making of public declarations and announcements.

Indian Drums and Cultural Processes

Functionally drums are often combined with idiophonic instruments in day-to-day use—though there are significant qualifications to this grouping.

It is obvious that the variety of drums exists because the functions drums are expected to carry out are equally varied. Music-making is not their sole purpose and criteria applied to assess worth of their contribution are expectably wider—going much beyond and they may often be hostile to music-making!

Like all major instruments roles drums play wide-ranging roles. They may merely function as musical aids or they may impress us as symbolic entities. Indian situation explores both these possibilities! This is to be expected as drums circulate in all six categories of Indian music. For example contexts in which drums appear may illustratively be listed as follows:

1. Public ceremony
2. War/conflict-related situations.
3. Procession
4. Ecstatic ritualistic/religious procedures including undergoing ordeal such as fire-walking, piercing one's own body, lashing oneself etc.
5. Trance situations

6. Comic /Recreational applications
7. As toys
8. Preceding public announcements of all kinds
9. Time measuring/keeping in art music
10. Creation of rhythm music in the art category
11. Festive occasions
12. Recreational performances with animals etc. as participants
13. Sending signals to far off places
14. Accompaniment to collective dancing/singing etc
15. Accompaniment for producing sound effects in dramatic performances etc.
16. Meting out punishment in public to criminals etc.
17. For inviting people to gather together
18. In cure or divination procedures.
19. Fertility rites

All drums are not played by all castes in India—a least this was not so till recently. A long tradition of elaborate taboos and prescriptions about which drum should be played by whom, when and how existed. For example, use of skin/hide of cow, sheep/ lizard often meant that Brahmins were not supposed to even touch drums using these. On the other hand association of certain drums like Damaru and Mridang with Lord Shiva meant these drums could be played by certain castes! In other words drums conveyed messages or stood for certain cultural significances—by themselves. Drums on the whole enjoy a pervasive symbolism. Association of drums with many kinds of rituals has also been noted.

Curt Sachs, a pioneering organologist with wide-ranging views, has also talked of sexual symbolism inherent to drums. Maintaining that the membrane-striker pair stood for female and male principles he argued that this is the reason why female players of drums is a rarity. Though females playing tabla is a recent phenomenon, and women playing Pakhawaj is still rare it would be easily seen that females playing drums is not rare in primitive, folk, religious and popular categories of music in India. In fact early musicological descriptions and sculptural evidence indicates women actively engaged in music-making with drums of different kinds! It is to be concluded that drum-symbolism in India has a different dimension.

This is where the Indian hierarchy about the principle of sound becomes relevant. According to it Shabda is the primary manifestation of the Principle of Sound. Shabda is defined as 'property of the ether (i.e. Akasha) and experience of the sense of hearing'. Akasha thus stands for the primeval cavity. This initial manifestation i.e. Shabda is of two basic types: Anahata Nada and Ahata Nada. The former—'the unstruck sound' is perceivable only to Yogin-s. The Ahata variety is perceivable to all normally endowed beings mainly through ears. This produces Dhvani which is described as 'that ahata nada which is produced by instruments such as Mridang'. (The human vocal mechanism is also rightly described as an instrument.) Dhvani then gives rise to Varna which is bifurcated in two streams—one leading to language and the other to music-making. Varna in music becomes

concrete through ascending/descending/unilinear sound and in language it formulates primary vowel-sounds and consonant-sounds. The last stage—that of Swara—yields musical notes/scales in music and a fuller system of vowel and consonant sounds in their full glory and variety.

Conclusion

The point is that the primary acoustic phenomenon related to drums and their sounds has, mainly speaking, three components: (1) Successful production of drum-sound needs creation of a cavity; (2) it is necessary to cover the cavity with a membrane created for the purpose of striking on it, and finally (3) a striking force which activates the membrane. This three-fold action is exactly the reverse of the process that creates primal Indian sound i.e. Shabda! Cosmic sound is not human-created and hence existence of the cavity, covering action by a membrane and action of the striking force to create sound—are not necessary! As far as the primal sound is concerned the cavity eternally exists in the form of Akasha (i.e. ether), this primal expression being 'anahata' i.e. unstruck it does not need a membrane that is struck upon nor the striking force to create Sound as the Cosmic Wind is always moving in the cavity i.e. ether. Primal sound and its constituents predate human existence and human action.

But humanly created sound cannot emerge unless cavity, membrane as well as striking action become 'concrete or real'! Therefore actions for creating cavity, covering it with membrane and striking on the membrane become inevitable precedents to emergence of perceivable sound. Human universe is the mirror-image of the primal universe! The apparent reversal of the primal position, action and result all are a concession to human frailty!

The cumulative result is that drums have attained the status of an entity that points to the primary symbolism. This symbolism—taken by itself—is outside the pale of human existence and experience. We need an agency to bring it down to human level! This in turn means activating the symbolism in such a way that human capacity and initiative can cope with it! To activate a drum is to enact the drama of creation of sound but on a human plane! Indeed the total Indian position on nature and significance of Sound can hardly exclude anybody from playing drums! Hence the variety, quality and pervasive presence of drums in India!