



# LESSER KNOWN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF INDIA

## KERALA

### INTRODUCTION

India has a rich tradition in music. It is imbued with different types of styles, forms and genres. The musical instruments play a great role in enhancing the quality of these music styles. Let us explore some of the unique musical instruments of Kerala.

### *PADAYANI THAPPU*

Padayani Thappu is a percussion instrument from Kerala. The drum called Thappu is played in the ritual art of Kerala called Padayani. Here the Thappu accompanies stylised dance movements during the ritual ceremony. Some of the popular rhythmic patterns are Champa, Kaarika, Kumba, Adantha and Marma among many others. The drum has a frame with wooden rim and with leather covering one side. It is struck with hands and is different from Parai Thappu (drum played with sticks). When devotional music is played, it is often accompanied by traditional cymbals known as Elathalam.



### *IDAKKA*

It somewhat resembles a Damru and is a hand-held percussion musical instrument. It is made in a shape of an hourglass and has its origins in Kerala. While the Damru is more of a combination of sounds of rattling knotted cords against the resonators, the Idakka is played with the help of sticks. It is slung over the



artist's left shoulder and is beaten with the help of a stick held in right hand. The tape wound secured in the middle portion of the Idakka is tightened or loosened accordingly to produce variations in tones. In Kerala, Idakka is considered to be a divine instrument (Devavadyam) and is essentially played during religious ceremonies and rituals by the Ambalavasi community (Marar or Poduval) outside the sanctum sanctorum (Garbhagriha) in temples. It is one of the five instruments that make the Panchavadyam (ensemble of 5 instruments) in Kerala religious tradition. During Kathakali (classical dance form) a special slot is kept for the playing of Idakka. Idakka forms an essential part of dance forms like Mohiniyattam and Krishanattam traditionally practiced in Kerala. Nowadays it is widely used in traditional recitals like Thayambaka.

## *ELATHALAM*

Elathalam is a cymbal from Kerala. It is in a pair of two and is entirely made out of bronze. Each cymbal is hand-held while banging one against another. It produces a sound of a distinct type of chime. It is majorly used as an accompaniment along with Panchavadyam, Chenda Melam and Thayambaka.



## *MIZHAVU*

Mizhavu is a percussion drum instrument made of copper. It is essentially played during the dance recitals of Koodiyattam and Koothu, traditional performing arts of Kerala. It is especially cared for in terms of its maintenance by placing it inside a wooden box. It is essentially played by the Ambalvasi Nambiar artists. Nowadays anyone who is interested in playing the instrument can learn it. Mizhavu is played only with hands. The percussion instrument is treated with utmost sanctity. It is played during the ritualistic performances held in temples.



## MADHALAM

Madhalam is a heavy drum made out of jackfruit tree. The two drumheads are covered with leather and makes different sound when struck. It is hung around the waist due to its heavy structure. The artist has to stand till the performance is over. It is a very important component of traditional Kerala percussion ensembles like Panchavadyam, Keli and Kathakali orchestra. It is considered as Devavadyam due to a belief that Madhalam resembles union (*ShivaSakthi swaroop*) of Lord Shiva (right drumhead )and Goddess Parvathi (left drumhead), when the two drumheads are struck together.



## ONAVILLU

It is a bow-shaped string musical instrument. It is made in a shape of a flat tapered bow from the pith of the Palmyra stem. The slivers made of Bamboo are used for making bowstrings. The bowstrings are struck with a thin stick to produce sound. The sound varies according to pressure put with fingers.

Its name originates from Onam festival celebrated in Kerala. It is traditionally used in dance performances. Though once majorly popular choice of instrument, its use is now comparatively on decline. It is sometimes decorated with tassels and used in ceremonies venerating Lord Vishnu. The making of ceremonial Onavillu is done by a local community. Devotees on Thiruvonam, (birthday of Lord Maha Vishnu), visit Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple and offer colourful Onavillu to the deity during Onavillu Charthal, dedication ceremony in Kerala.



### DID YOU KNOW???

According to one legend, Vaman avatar of Lord Vishnu was pushing King Mahabali into the earth. But Mahabali prayed for one boon that he is allowed to visit his native land every year to pay his offerings to Lord Vishnu. His prayers were answered but with a condition that he would be able to see Lord Vishnu only through painted imagery. Lord Vishvakarman was given the task of painting images of Dasavatharam on pieces of Kadambu wood. This is how Onavillu was originated.

# ACTIVITY

1. Visit National museum or state museum in your city and observe musical instruments belonging to ancient period. Make a list of instruments according to category provided here.

- a. String instrument \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Percussion instrument \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Wind instrument \_\_\_\_\_

2. Identify the difference between the two pictures given below.



Pakhavaj



Madhalam

3. What is the legend behind Onavillu? Write in your own words.

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**CREDITS:**

<http://www.thebetterindia.com/26502/indian-musical-instruments/><https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-lesser-known-Indian-musical-instruments/><http://www.thebetterindia.com/26502/indian-musical-instruments/>