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### Musical Instruments of India and Turkey: Some Connections\*

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**Abstract.** Each society has a unique musical system related to the character of its culture. Description of a musical event may be considered broadly representative of its cultural area. Therefore, musical instruments and their connections with different cultures could be one of the significant musical events to talk about.

This paper presents brief historic explanations about India and Turkey as well as some background information about the musical instruments of these countries and some connections among them.

It can be said that over the centuries there has been a continuous give and take between Persian, Arabs, Indians, and Turks. Thus, musical instruments have been adopted and accepted in all of these countries. This study shows that musical instruments from different areas of the Middle East and south Asia clearly belong to the same artistic family. However, it is important to note that the instruments with the same or similar names can refer to very different instruments, and the same instruments can go by many and varied names. Even the type of music may change an instrument's name. Therefore, we should never trust a name of an instrument unless its precise origins are known, and who plays it.

**Key Words:** Musical instruments, India, Turkey.

**Özet.** Her toplum kendi kültürünün karakteriyle ilgili eşsiz bir müzik sistemine sahiptir. Bir müzik etkinliği, içinde bulunduğu kültürü temsil eder. Bu nedenle, müzik aletleri ve müzik aletlerinin farklı kültürler arasındaki bağları konuşulması gereken önemli konulardan biridir.

Bu çalışma ile Hindistan ve Türkiye tarihi hakkında kısa bilgiler verilerek bu ülkelerde kullanılan müzik aletlerinden örnekler sunulması ve bu müzik aletleri arasındaki bağlantıların kurulması hedeflenmiştir.

Yüzyıllar boyunca İranlılar, Araplar, Hintliler ve Türkler arasında sürekli bir kültürel alış-veriş olmuştur. Bu sebeple, birçok müzik enstrümanı da bu ülkeler tarafından benimsenmiş ve kabul görmüştür. Bu çalışma Orta Doğu'da ve Güney Asya'nın farklı bölgelerinde kullanılan müzik aletlerinin çok açık bir şekilde aynı aileye ait olduklarını göstermektedir. Burada önemli olarak not edilmelidir ki, aynı ismi taşıyan enstrümanlar farklı enstrümanlarla ilgili olabildiği gibi farklı ismi taşıyan enstrümanlar aynı enstrümana işaret edebilir. Hatta müzik türü bile enstrümanın ismini değiştirebilir. Bu nedenle, enstrümanlar arasında bağlantı kurarken asıl kaynağının nereden geldiğini ve kim tarafından çalındığını bilmeden ismine bakarak hareket etmemek gerekir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Müzik aletleri, Hindistan, Türkiye.

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## Introduction

Music is a cultural phenomenon. It is also a social structure. Every musical system, that is, the music and musical life of any society, is a very complex phenomenon that may be analyzed and comprehended from many perspectives. Each society has a unique musical system related to the character of its culture. Kaemmer states that, "As far back as data are available, musical cultures have changed by borrowing new instruments, repertoires, and even uses of music from other societies" (Kaemmer 1993:192). Description of a musical event may be considered broadly representative of its culture area. Therefore, musical instruments and their connections with different cultures could be one of the significant musical events to talk about. Nettl states that,

Bowed, stringed instruments held vertically, like the cello, appear throughout Asia, Europe, and parts of Africa. As we have just seen in the case of the Apache fiddle, they probably developed in the native cultures of the Americas as a result of culture contact with Europeans. Xylophone like instruments were highly developed in Indonesia, Africa, and Central America. Flutes, drums, and rattles are found

throughout the world. Yet each culture has its own version of an instrument type, its own set of ideas about it, and its own terminology (Nettl 1997:8).

As understood from the above statements, we can say that the musics of different cultures, while showing regional variations, are closely related to each other. This relationship can be observed most clearly in the musical instruments. One of the examples can be seen on the classical instruments from the different areas of the Middle East and South Asia. For instance, India and Turkey have same connections in their musical instruments.

In this paper, it is aimed to present brief historic explanations about India and Turkey to provide

knowledge of geography, people, history, socio-cultural context of the cultures overtime as well as some background information about the musical instruments of these countries and make some the connections among them. It is important to note that India and Turkey are only two examples of many around the world and the instruments that will be discussed in this paper are only four of many.

### **India and Turkey**

The Indian subcontinent includes the modern nation states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, as well as the distinctive region of Kashmir. Where the rubric “South Asia” is used, Afghanistan is sometimes included as well. With respect to its diversity and its underlying ecological and cultural coherence, the Indian subcontinent is roughly comparable to the European subcontinent or to southeast Asia.

India is a country of diverse geography, peoples, religions, and music. The history of this area began with the Dravidian civilization, between 2500 and 1900 B.C. When the Indo-Europeans came into India around 1500 B.C., they supplanted the early people, especially Dravidians (Malm 1977:114). They also brought European culture into India. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, followers of Islam from Afghanistan, Turkey, Persia, and central Asia extended control over their subjects on the subcontinent, mainly in the northern areas. Today, the dominant religions of the subcontinent are Hinduism and Islam. After people from western Asia (e.g. Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia) settled in India and converted most of the Indians to the Muslim religion, north India produced a new Islamic-Hindu religion, while the south part became the center for the Hindu tradition.

In south Asia, recognized dialects of classical music are divided into two parts: Hindustani music of the north that represents the great tradition of the region where Indo-Aryan languages are spoken; and Karnatak music of the south that represents the great tradition of the Dravidian-speaking areas. From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, the stylistic distinction between the Hindustani and Karnatic can be closely related to the more general south Asian dichotomy between Hindu and Muslim. There is a corresponding contrast between Sanskrit and Persian words mostly in the technical terminology of music, particularly with reference to instruments (Powers 1984:73). Although these two traditions use different instruments, their basic concepts are the same and have been cultivated in south Asia for centuries.

Turkey is also a country on the continent of Asia. The Turks, come from Central Asia and made their way toward the west until they occupied virtually all of Anatolia, over 900 years ago. They took with them their own folk music, in which the central Asian origin can still be recognized. The adoption of Islam by the Turks also contributed to a cultural metamorphosis, and the development of Turkish art music was further affected by impulses from the Persian and Byzantine sphere.

The Anatolian Turks played a leading role in the musical life of the Ottoman Empire. The spreading of Turkish music throughout the empire is embodied by the present stratification of Balkan music, especially some aspects of Greek music, as may be seen in Turkish-Oriental features and the use of Turkish musical instruments. Two basic types of music systems developed in the Turkish tradition: art music and folk music. Although both occur within the same country, their moods are totally different, especially in the use of the musical instruments.

### **Musical Instruments of India**

Four Indian musical instruments will be discussed in this paper: the *tambura*, *sarangi*, *shahnai*, and *tavil*. Musical instruments of India are grouped in four classes: strings, winds, drums, and idiophones (Powers 1984:125). According to Indian traditions, the *tambura* and *sarangi* are strings; *shahnai* is a wind; and *tavil* is in the drums class.

### **Tambura**

The *tambura* (also called *tanpura*) is one of the classical instruments of the stringed group (see image 1). It is used throughout India for drone

accompaniment, and it appears in almost infinite number of varieties. It is an ancient instrument, and the simplest of all guitar-like instruments, but it has a very long neck without frets. The body is generally made of about the two-thirds of the dry shell of a gourd, with the top covered by a thin board (Jones & Willard 1962:65). The overall length of the instrument varies from 1 to 1.5 meter (Krishnaswami 1967:39).

There are four metal strings, three made of steel and the fourth and lowest one of brass. The tambura is usually held upright, the body resting upon the floor or ground in front of the performer. Sometimes the bowl is placed on the right thigh. The strings are gently and continuously plucked with the fingers, one after another, in the same order. The tambura player usually sits behind the main artist so the former can hear the drone constantly.



*Image 1. Tambura and tambura player*

### **Sarangi**

The sarangi is the fiddle of India. It is a very popular non-fretted bowed instrument that is played upright (see image 2). The instrument is played both in folk and concert music in the north. The concert sarangi has three gut strings. In addition to main strings, it has approximately eighteen sympathetic strings. Four tuning pegs are fixed to the hollow head, one on each side. A sarangi player stops the strings on the sides, touching the nails of the fingers with the knuckles. The body is placed on the lap of the performer. The head rests against the left shoulder. The bow is held with the palm facing outward. This is one of the typical characteristics of playing upright bowed instruments in India. The sarangi is mostly used in the accompaniment of vocal music. Very recently, it has begun to be used as a solo instrument (Sanyal 1985:32).



*Image 2. Sarangi*

### **Shahnai**

The shahnai, the predominant double reed instrument of the north, is a tube that gradually widens towards the lower end (see image 3). It usually has eight or nine holes, the upper seven of them alone are used in performance. The remaining one or two are either stopped with wax or left open. The length of the instrument is 45 to 60 centimeter. The reed is fixed at the narrow blowing end. Shahnai playing requires a very complicated technique. To produce the half-tones and quarter-tones, players not only partially close and open the finger holes, but also adjust the pressure of air in the pipe. This is a laborious process; thus, it takes a long time for a musician to attain proficiency on this instrument (Krishnaswami 1967:65).

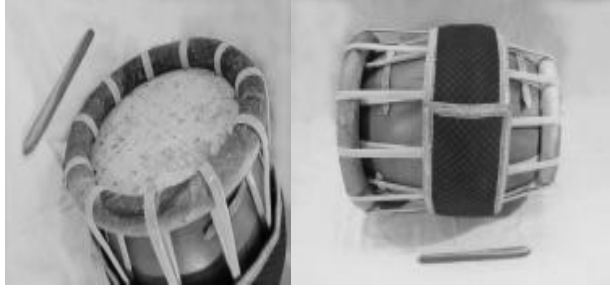


*Image 3. Shahnai*

### **Tavil**

The tavil consists of a barrel-shaped shell hollowed out of a solid block of wood (see image 4). The skins on the two sides are stretched over hoops made of hemp and six or seven bamboo sticks bundled together. The skin on the right side is stretched very tight but not tuned to a definite pitch. The right hand plays the right head, with wrist and fingers, whereas the left head is played with a thick stick (Marcuse 1975:515). In an open-air performance,

the taval is hung on the shoulders, and brought to the front and played while the performer stands. The taval traditionally accompanies the *nagasvaram*, an instrument similar to the shahnai, in the south part of India.



*Image 4. Taval*

### **Musical Instruments of Turkey**

Earlier in this paper, two basic musical traditions in Turkey is mentioned. One is Turkish art music and the other is Turkish folk music. Turkish art music was borrowed from neighboring lands. The *ud*, an unfretted short-necked lute, betrays its Arab origin through its name. (Reinhard 1980:273). For this reason, the *ud* is not discussed in this paper. However, four other musical instruments, as mentioned earlier will be explained. The *tanbur* can be categorized as a Turkish art music instrument, while the *kemençe*, *zurna*, and *davul* may be considered Turkish folk music instruments.

### **Tanbur**

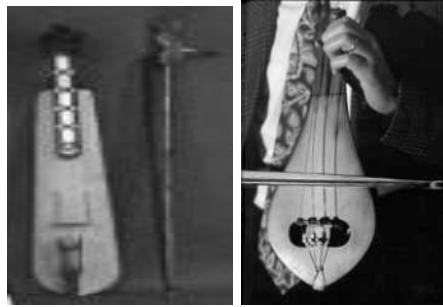
The tanbur is a long-necked lute of characteristic Turkish form with a virtually hemispherical body (Reinhard 1980:273). The long lute has a small pear-shaped wooden body and a long neck without a pegbox, many gut frets, and from two to ten metal strings in double courses (Malm 1977:79). The tanbur is bowed on occasion (see image 5).



*Image 5. Tanbur and tanbur player*

### **Kemençe**

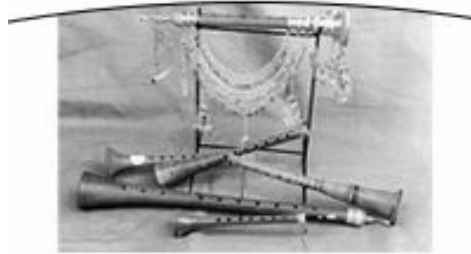
The kemençe, an oblong bowed lute with three strings, is found only on the eastern coast of the Black Sea in Turkey. This solo instrument is always played in two-part parallel polyphony, usually in 4ths (Reinhard 1980:270) (see image 6). When played, the body of the kemençe is placed on the left lap of the performer. The head rests against the left shoulder. It is usually played by pressing two strings at the same time.



*Image 6. Kemençe and kemençe player*

### **Zurna**

The zurna is lathed from one piece of maple or fruit wood, and has one thumb hole and up to eighth finger holes. The upper part of the bore is cylindrical, and the lower part conical. It has seven front finger holes and a rear thumb hole, plus a number of vent holes (Marcuse 1975:602). Several sizes of zurna are found in different parts of Turkey (see image 7), all with cylindrical bores with seven finger holes and a thumb hole (Picken 1975:486). When played, the tiny double reed mouthpiece is completely inserted into the mouth; players use circular breathing so that the melody is continuous (Reinhard 1980:270). Because of its strong sound, it is generally played in the open air and accompanied with a drum.



*Image 7. Zurna*



### **Davul**

The davul is a bass drum which two heads are stretched over hoops and laced to each other along the body. One head is struck with a drumstick while other is played with a switch (see image 8). The main beats are executed with a heavy stick on the right side, and the rhythmic subdivisions with a thin stick on the left. The skin on the right side of the drum is thick, while the left side skin is thinner. It is played while hung on the shoulder with a knitted or leather strap. Davul is a bass drum that is usually used outdoors, often to accompany the zurna (Marcuse 1975:142).



*Image 8. Davul*

### **Historical Connections of Musical Instruments of India and Turkey**

Making a connection between the instruments is a vast field to work on. For that reason, the following section is about the instruments mentioned in the previous part (see table 1).

The first instrument is called tambura in India and tanbur in Turkey. The tambura is an Indian string drone instrument with open strings, and the tanbur is a Turkish classical lute with an extremely long neck. The Indian tambura and Turkish tanbur have almost the same shape, but they show some regional differences in their usage. For instance, the Indian tambura is a plucked instrument, but the Turkish tanbur can be both plucked and bowed instrument depending on the region and musical style. The origin of both instruments is usually attributed to the Middle East. However, Deva asserts that according to Abdul Razak Kanpuri, the word tambura is Indian. His 'Al-Bramika' gives the Indian term as *tumba*, which in Iran was modified into *tumbura*, in Arabia into *tunbur*, and in Turkey into tanbur (Deva 1978:155).

The second instrument is called the sarangi in India and kemençe in Turkey. The short lute, originally hollowed out of one block of wood, resulted in a similar construction in its bowed equivalent. This is the classical kemençe of Turkey, which is similar to the sarangi in India. Although the short lutes of

India seem very different in shape from those of the further west, they are also hollowed out of one piece of wood. Furthermore, the sarangi and kemençe are both bowed instruments. Jenkins & Olsen stated that the small Black Sea kemençe was a forerunner, possibly even a model, of the European fiddle of the early Middle Ages (Jenkins & Olsen 1976:39).

The next instrument is called shahnai in India and zurna in Turkey. Double reed instruments with conical bores are most often called a variant of *surnai*, *zurna*, *sirnai*, *sarune*, shahnai, and others. The surnai may perhaps be the older name. The instrument itself is used in Central Asia and in the Slavic countries, where it goes under the name zurna. The surnai, zurna, *sundri*, *sunadi*, and shahnai are very similar to each other, not only in structure, but also in their linguistic relations (Deva 1978:121).

The last instrument is called taval in India and davul in Turkey. Similar to the explanation above, the linguistic relations between these two instruments are obvious. Davul, taval, *tabl*, *dahal* are names that refer to the same type of instrument. The two-skin drums (which are not frame drums, but barrel-shaped or cylindrical drums) are folk instruments and prominent in this sphere, just as they were in the Turkish military bands (Jenkins & Olsen 1976:75). Especially, the davul and zurna ensemble can be found in places as far apart as India, Morocco, and the Balkans.

Table 1






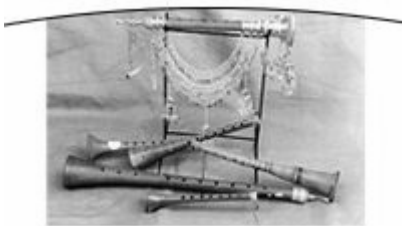


India	Turkey
<b>Tambura</b> 	<b>Tambur</b> 
<b>Sarangi</b> 	<b>Kemençe</b> 

Table 1 continued.

<b>Shahnai</b> 	<b>Zurna</b> 
<b>Tavil</b> 	<b>Davul</b> 

### Conclusion

These classical instruments from different areas of the Middle East and South Asia clearly belong to the same family. It is undeniable that over the centuries there has been a continuous give-and-take between Persians, Arabs, Indians, and Turks. Even greater importance is the fact that the major portion of the Middle East, from the beginning of the fourteenth century and to the early twentieth century, was dominated by the Ottoman Turks, whose empire, at its height in the sixteenth century, stretched from the frontiers of Austria and southern Russia to India, and from Morocco to the Arabian peninsula. Turkish musical ideas were spread widely during this long period (Jenkins & Olsen 1976:18). Thus, musical instruments have been adopted and accepted in all of these countries.

Although this subject itself is a large one, it is clear that connections can be made among the instruments despite of all the regional variations. Thus, with the same or similar names referring to very different instruments, and the same instruments going by many and varied names, the best rule to follow would seem to be: "Do not trust the name of an instrument unless its precise origins are known, and who plays it." Even the type of music may change an instrument's name.

This paper aimed to bring these explanations to give some ideas how music from different cultures can be varied in itself but can be closely related to each other as well. Knowing the relationships between Indian and Turkish musical instruments helps us to recognize some structures of these two cultures and knowing the use of these instruments and the history behind it will help musicians to use authentic sources and to be more creative, well-equipped, and open-minded. Therefore, bringing these issues to an attention and make connections among each other are important aspects as it will give some important experience to the musicians to understand diversities.

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\* *This article has been developed from the study presented at the Third International Scientific Conference "Music – Tradition And Contempor" organized by the South-West University 'Neofit Rilsky' Faculty Of Arts in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria on 25 November 2005.*

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### Summary

Each society has a unique musical system related to the character of its culture. Music is a cultural phenomenon. It is also a social structure. Description of a musical event may be considered broadly representative of its cultural area. However, musics of different cultures, while showing regional variations, are closely related to each other. This relationship can be observed most clearly in the musical instruments. One of the examples can be seen on the classical instruments from the different areas of the Middle East and South Asia.

Over the centuries there has been a continuous give and take between Persian, Arabs, Indians, and Turks. For instance, after people from western Asia (e.g. Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia) settled in India and converted most of the Indians to the Muslim religion, north India produced a new Islamic-Hindu religion, while the south part became the center for the Hindu tradition. Even greater importance is the fact that the major portion of the Middle East, from the beginning of the fourteenth century and to the early twentieth century, was dominated by the Ottoman Turks, whose empire, at its height in the sixteenth century, stretched from the frontiers of Austria and southern Russia to India, and from Morocco to the Arabian peninsula. Turkish musical ideas were spread widely during this long period (Jenkins & Olsen 1976:18). Thus, musical instruments have been adopted and accepted in all of these countries.

This study presents brief historic explanations about India and Turkey as well as some background information about the musical instruments of these countries and some connections among them. Four Indian and Turkish musical instruments are discussed in this paper: the *tambura*, *sarangi*, *shahnai*, and *tavil* in India and the *tanbur*, *kemençe*, *zurna*, and *davul* in Turkey. According to Indian traditions, the *tambura* and *sarangi* are grouped in the strings class; *shahnai* is in a wind class; and *tavil* is in the drums class. In the Turkish tradition, two basic types of music systems developed: art music and folk music. In this system, the *tanbur* can be categorized as a Turkish art music instrument, while the *kemençe*, *zurna*, and *davul* may be considered Turkish folk music instruments. It is important to note that India and Turkey are only two examples of many around the world and the instruments that are discussed in this paper are only four of many.

This study shows that musical instruments from different areas of the Middle East and south Asia clearly belong to the same family. Therefore, musical

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