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Origin of word 'Tabla' from the ancient Indian language: Sanskrit

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Abstract

Tabla is one of the most important percussion instruments in the world of Indian music. However, there are not many solid pieces of evidence or facts regarding the origin of Tabla. It is still unclear by whom or when was Tabla invented. But from the perspective of languages, it is quite clear that the word 'Tabla' has strong roots in Sanskrit, which had later migrated to different parts of the world and was known by different names. According to many historians and scholars, Sanskrit is strongly related to many foreign languages across the world directly or indirectly, mainly Indo-European languages, which is apparent in many of their similar-sounding words. Between different sections of Indo-Europeans, there is also a similarity in the languages with slight differences. Their ancestors, having been traced back to have originated from a single place, spoke only one language. Even when we travel a significant distance, we can observe a change in the dialect of the local language. Hence, it is the opinion of historians that Sanskrit has indirect relations with many other foreign languages. 'Tabl' word is an original word found in Sanskrit. Thus, it is quite normal that many variations of the word might be found in many other languages. This is a piece of strong evidence against the motion that Tabla did not originate from India, and rather strengthens the roots of the instrument in the history of Indian music and culture.

Keyword: Sanskrit, historical analysis, lingual and cultural comparison of table (tablā, tabl, tavola, tabula, balata, tibela, tabl.), origin of tabla, indo-european languages, gandharva, vedas

Introduction

Scope And Utility

Amidst the unclear information about the much-discussed topic of Origin and Evolution of Tabla, Sanskrit, being the mother of all languages, show evidence of the origin of the word 'Tabla' from multiple scriptures. In this article, we will compare the evolution of Tabla from different cultures and languages and conclude how all strings are attached to the ancient Aryan language- Sanskrit. In modern times, when scholars and students are confused with the conflicts, arguments and disagreements, this will quench the thirst for knowledge by generalising the arguments based on evidence according to the questions arisen by the researchers, students and common folks.

Music has been used as an umbrella term to denote any dance, vocal or performing arts for a long time in India. Vocal arts have been deemed the primary art form, while dance and instrumentals have been used as accompanying arts. Equipment for producing musical tunes as well as for playing different taals is called instruments. Musical instruments have been divided into 4 categories -Tat-vadya (strings), Sushir-vadya (wind), Ghana-vadya (metal) and Avanaddh-vadya (percussion). Among all the percussion instruments, Tabla is one of the most popular Indian drums. The origin of the instrument as well as the name, has been a topic of controversy among scholars for a very long time, but from a language point of view, it seems to have been named in the Sanskrit language.

Due to the similarities between different languages, the word Tabla has travelled from India to other parts of the world. According to the ancient facts of Dravid and Indus Valley Civilisation, much of the differences cannot be seen. They are almost similar, though, before the coming of Aryan, the Dravidians were the ones who were progressing. The Dravidian civilisation was the pride of India. Dravidians were much more advanced when it comes to music. Aryans also liked the art and music of the Dravidians very much though both of the civilisations were really developed in this field.

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“The basis of Hinduism is The Vedas which were actually created by Aryans. Even the scientists consider this as the most ancient scripture found. It is believed that the places where the ancient people started living, the Vedas and the ancient cultures reached that place and flourished. But the heart of all this development had always been India. Later when people started migrating to different places, their colour, structure and other characteristics were influenced by the weather and natural diversity of that place. Due to the problems in travelling from one place to another, many places lost their access to India, which resulted in the cutting off of connection that provided them with the originality of Indians, and other Indian Puritans and thus they emerged as foreigners due to their changed living style or and other physical characteristics. From this, it can be stated that Aryans were the ancient people who lived in India and they were divided into different regions where later they acquired different recognition^[1].

Aryans entered India before 4000 BCE. The Vedas which were created before 2000 BCE is still being respected as a religious scripture of Hindus. “According to Sri Pradip Kumar Rawat, the word Tabal had originated from the Aryan Language and its different forms can be seen in different parts of the world. Chapter 30 of Yajurveda consists of a word, Tunavadyam, which means Tabla and is depicted in its translations^[2]. Pandit Vijayshankar Mishra in his book Tabla Purana (page-13) has stated that tabl is a pure Sanskrit word. This word is used in Yajurveda which is used for percussion instruments. This word is taken from Sanskrit and used in Latin, English, French, Arabian and Persian language which means an instrument facing upward. In his book, he has claimed that Tabla is an Indian instrument. He also states that Tabla has not been invented by a single person; it is the instrument that came to its form by the mixture of Urhwaka and Pushkar due to the age-old traditions and the requirements of the society in the history of Indian Classical Music^[3]. According to an Odia Book by Manmath Das, Sir William Jones, in 1786 AD, stated that the Persian language, Greek language, Romanian language, Germany Language and the languages of Kelat were similar to that of Sanskrit Language. These languages were also originated from a root language which couldn't thrive but shows its presence in some way or other by the resemblance of different languages”^[4].

According to Umesh Joshi, a comparative study of ancient Iranian culture and religious scriptures and ancient literature puts forward some new facts. The language “Zend Avesta” resembles the language of the Indian Vedas. The god worshipped by Iranians and Aryans was one. The Indian and

Iranian music was also based on a single system which can also be seen till today. From these findings, the scholars have concluded that the Indians and the Aryans were the descendants of the same ancestor. There native has been a commonplace where their ancestor lived^[5].

Keeping in view the similarity in the language of the Indo-European People it was taken into account that their ancestors lived together and used the same language. Regarding this, Mac Samular and western scientists stated that the ancestors of Bharatiyas, Persian, Greeks, Romanian, Kelat, and Germans lived not only in one place but also may be in the same house as a family. Many scholars state that the similarity in the languages is also connected with the similarity in blood relations. Sanskrit, German and other Indo-European languages were recognised as the Aryan language and the people speaking those languages were known as the Aryans. According to different scholars, India is the native of the Aryans and the ancient literature of the Aryans is Veda which was created in India. The ancient Aryans are also said to be travelling from India to the Persian and European continent^[6]. According to Comparative philology, all the languages of modern Europe belonged to that family whose root language was Sanskrit, which has almost 102 billion 78 crores 50 lakhs prevalent words, according to Rajiv Dikshit. These words have been in common use since ancient times of Panini. It has been verified that no other language uses as many words as Sanskrit does. Hundreds of words in this language was of the same type and it can be deduced that the language of Ancient Aryans and the modern European language such as French, Italian, Unani, English, Russian, and German are similar. A scientist collected the names of animals, birds, flowers, trees in different languages and concluded that the origin of languages started from Indian from where the Aryans spread to different places. The art and music of the Aryans were so developed that they left their influence to whichever place they go. This is the reason why Asian music and European music have a hint of Indian music in them. Art and music also influenced the nature of the Aryans in a good way^[7].

Yogamaya Shukla states that there is no mention of the history of Tabla with the term ‘tabola’ as any root percussion instrument. But in its place, the ‘tabala’ word is found in medieval Sanskrit, Persian, Assamese, Hindi and Urdu literature^[8]. According to many religious scholars, many such examples were found in ancient culture, social structure, customs and traditions, art and culture of different countries which make them similar to that of India. The words in the languages of many of these countries show their resemblance with India. Some examples are given below:

Table 1: Similarity of Words in Different Language

Sl. No.	Sanskrit	Irani/Parsi	Latin	English	Greek	German
1.	Pitara	Pedar	Pater	Father	Patéras	Vater/Fater
2.	Matera	Mâdar	Mater	Mother	Mitéra	Mutter
3.	Bhratru	Baradar	Frater	Brother	Adelfós	Bruder
4.	Duhitru	Doxtar	Filia	Daughter		Tochter
5.	Pada	Pa	Pes	Foot	Pódi	Fus
6.	Phalam	Mive	Fructus	Fruit		

Similarly, Tabla in different languages can be depicted as:

Language	Name
Hindi	Tablā
Arabic	Tabl
French	Table
Italian	Tavola
Latin	Tabula
Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian literature	Balata
Hebrew	Tibela
Persian and Turkish	Tabl
Acadian Literature	Balaggu
Syrian	Tabla

Vedic age is one of the most ancient eras of Indian history. Rig Veda is the oldest literature available to humankind. Many ancient facts are present in this Veda about Indian culture and music. Many signs of influence of Indian culture Yunani, Roman, Syrian and Egyptian cultures have been observed. The word 'Gandharva' is known in Iran as 'Gandhareva', and in Yunan as 'Kentaras'^[9]. According to the Syrian literature, Tabla was stated to be played in the temples of their god named Ia or in-ki^[10]. Many familiar words and names of the gods and goddess are stated to be originated from a root word in the Persian language, the name of many percussion instruments starts with the word tabl such as Tabl-Baladi, Tabl-Turkey, Tabl-Jung, Tabl-Sami, Tabl Migari, Tabl-Al-Makarab, Tabl-Al-Gabik, Tabl-Al-Sabis, Tabl-Alam etc. The word Tabl is said to be originated from the Arabian language and later it may be used widely in the Persian language. When studying the relation of different languages and the words, it can be said that all the other words have been taken or originated from the root language Sanskrit. The resemblance of words also states that in ancient history there may be some similarities in the structure and shape of the percussion instruments. The unavailability of its playing style can have many reasons due to which its particulars are also unavailable. The books and research of different scholars across the world state that the word Tabla had been there in Indian history since time unknown.

Titbits of evidence of the presence of this instrument are found in religious and philosophical scriptures. Many examples can be given with it. We can consider how this resemblance came into play which has been well described by Umesh Joshi in his book "Bharatiya Sangeet ka Itihas" for three main reasons. Firstly, the impact of different things that evolution has been set into the mind of people due to differences in tradition and culture. Then, it would have spread into different countries from Indian or the people of India must have travelled to other countries to spread the Indian tradition and culture all over the world. Or else the foreigners must have embraced the tradition and culture of India. Lastly, it may also be possible that the Indians must have taken it from other countries. Though most of the scholars approve it to be the latter, many foreign scholars state that India has learnt many things from western countries. There is also one view of the scholars of the culture of different countries that state that the tradition and culture of different countries evolved independently. Most of the scholars affirm that the cultures are interrelated to each other in one way or another. Considering this scenario, the first question that arises is whether the human form evolution occurred in a single place? And did they later spread into different parts of the lands? Or did humans evolve independently at different places of the earth? The Indian

historians agree with the first notion of these three. The mythological sequence of the creation of life, states that the human form started evolving from India only and it has widely developed across the globe. In the 3rd Skanda of Bhagavat, there is evidence of this notion. In the 4th Skanda it is stated that before king Prithu, there were no imagination villages or cities on this earth. The 5th Skanda states that from the wheels of the chariot of King Priyabrata, the 7 continents and 7 oceans were created. King Prithu had arranged and

*"Athasmin Bhagawan Bainyaha Prajanam Brutidaha pita /
Nibasan Kalpayachankre Tatra Yatha Hrathaha //
Graman Puraha Parnonani Durgani Vividhani Cha /
Ghosan brajan sashibirankaran kheta kharbatan //"*
(Srimad bhagavat 4 / 18 / 30-31)^[11]

Thus, we can conclude that the origin and evolution of Tabla have been from ancient times. There have been changes in the way of living and also many cultures evolved across the globe. But India, being the point of origin and Sanskrit, being the mother of all Languages shows us the way to the genesis of this incredible instrument. Hence, as per all the evidence found in different scriptures and the views of the historian, we conclude that the word Tabla although found in different regions, languages and cultures, has originated from the Sanskrit Language and has been distributed across the world from India.

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