

Tabla terms and glossary

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This section is not intended to be a comprehensive glossary of tabla terminology and concepts, but contains some information useful for students just starting out. To print this page, use the PDF (without images) or Print (with images) links above. Drum names:

Tabla, aka Dayan ('right'): the right hand, treble drum. The shell is constructed of wood.

Bayan ('left'), aka Duggi: the left hand, bass drum. The shell is constructed of copper, sometimes nickel-plated, or brass.

Kinar: the outer portion of the skin, overlapping the sur. The stroke 'na' is played here.

Sur: The part of the tabla head between the kinar and the gab. The stroke 'tin' aka 'ta' is played here. Sur literally means 'tone'.

Gab: the black spot in the centre of the tabla and baya head, which gives drums their unique tone. There are a number of individual and combination strokes played on the gab, Tete, for example. Tabla Strokes:

These are difficult to describe, so I will simply list some common strokes.

Tabla only: Na, Ta, Tin, Te (Tete), Ti, Ne, Re, Tun, Di, Tak

Baya only: Ghe, Ge, Ghen, Ke, Ki, Kat

Some individual combination strokes: Dha (na + ghe), Dhin or Dhi (tin + ghe) or (tun + ghe), Thun (tun + ke), Dhe (te + ghe), Kre (te + ke), Kran (tin + ke)

Some grouped combination strokes*: Terekite, Kitetake, TerekiteTake, TerekiteTakTerekite, DheneGhene, DheneTage, ThunnaKena, Dhinnagena, DhageThunnaKena, DhageDhinnaGhena, TeteKetaGediGhene, Gherenage.

*There are many many more grouped combinations than listed above. These are simply examples of some common stroke combinations. Tabla forms/compositions/repertoire:

Tihai: a phrase repeated three times, with the final stroke landing on sam, the first beat of the rhythmic cycle. Tihais commonly end both improvised and pre-composed tabla forms, and are used throughout Indian music and dance.

Kayda (Qa'ida): An improvised theme-and-variations form. Variations are derived from the thematic material, ending with a tihai.

Rela: A different improvised theme-and-variations form. Relas are constructed of shorter, speedier strokes than Kaydas, and are generally played faster. Rela literally means 'a flood' or 'rushing'.

Peshkar: another improvised theme-and-variations form, played at the beginning of a tabla solo, with strokes derived from the theka.

Gat: a pre-composed form, consisting of very elaborate and extravagant combinations of strokes.

Thukra: A short, pre-composed composition, ending with a tihai.

Paran: similar to a Thukra, but with strokes derived from the Pakhawaj drum, an older relative of the tabla. Also, compositions derived from Kathak dance repertoire.

Chakradar: A composition performed three times, like a tihai, except often much longer, and with each phrase ending with it's own tihai. Tala and Theka

Tala (tal): A rhythmic cycle of a fixed number of beats. Also refers to the system of Indian rhythm as a whole.

Theka: A set of tabla strokes that outline and define the structural divisions of the tala (rhythmic cycle). Used in accompaniment, each theka is unique to a specific tala, and is played almost identically by every tabla player, though there is room for elaboration and embellishment.

Below are some examples of common talas, their sub-divisions (internal structures) and their thekas:

Tintal (16 beats), divided 4-4-4-4

Dha Dhin Dhin Dha | Dha Dhin Dhin Dha | Dha Tin Tin Ta | Ta Dhin Dhin Dha

Jhaptal (10 beats), divided 2-3-2-3

Dhin Na | Dhin Dhin Na | Tin Na | Dhin Dhin Na

Rupak Tal (7 beats), divided 3-2-2

Tin Tin Na | Dhin Na | Dhin Na

Ektal (12 beats), divided 2-2-2-2-2-2

Dhin Dhin | Dhage Terekite | Thun Na | Kat Ta | Dhage Terekite | Dhin Na

Dadra (6 beats), divided 3-3

Dha Dhin Na | Dha Tin Na

Kaharva (8 beats), divided 2-2-2-2

Dha Ge | Na Tin | Na Ke | Ghe naBhari/Khali:

Certain types of tabla repertoire feature sections where open baya strokes are omitted. A kayda theme, for example, will have 2 sections, which are identical in rhythmic content, however the second section will have a portion that omits open baya strokes.

Bhari (lit. 'full'): refers to a section with open baya strokes. An open stroke is called 'khula'.

Khali (lit. 'empty'): refers to a section with closed baya strokes. A closed stroke is called 'bandh'.

Examples: Bhari (khula) -> Khali (bandh)

Ghe -> Ke

Dha -> Ta (na)

Dhin (sur) -> Tin

Dhin (w tun) -> Thun

DhagenDha -> TakenaTa

DhegeTerekite GhegheTerekite Dheneghene -> TakeTerekite KekeTerekite Thenekene

Example of a kayda:

Dha Tete Dha Tete DhaDha Tete Dhage Thunna Kena (Bhari)

Ta Tete Ta Tete TaTa Tete Dhage Dhinna Gena (Khali)